AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION REEXAMINED: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

INTO ORGANIC AND CONTRIVED CIVIL THEOLOGY

Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this dissertation is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee. This dissertation does not include proprietary or classified information.

_____

Troy Manuel Vidal

Certificate of Approval:

_____	_____
Anne Permaloff Professor Political Science	Murray Jardine, Chair Professor Political Science
_____	_____
Steven Brown Associate Professor Political Science	Paul Starr Professor Sociology

_____

George T. Flowers
Interim Dean
Graduate School

AMERICAN CIVIL RELEGION REEXAMINED: A PRELIMINARY STUDY INTO ORGANIC AND CONTRIVED CIVIL THEOLOGY

Troy Manuel Vidal

A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
May 10, 2007

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION REEXAMINED: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

INTO ORGANIC AND CONTRIVED CIVIL THEOLOGY

Troy Manuel Vidal

Permission is granted to Auburn University to make copies of this dissertation at its discretion, upon request of individuals or institutions and at their expense. The author reserves all publication rights.

_____
Signature of Author

_____
Date of Graduation

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION REEXAMINED: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

INTO ORGANIC AND CONTRIVED CIVIL THEOLOGY

Troy Manuel Vidal

Doctor of Philosophy, May 10, 2007
(MPA, University of North Florida, 2000)
(BA, University of North Florida, 1998)

287 Typed Pages

Directed by Murray Jardine

Civil religion forms both the basis and the underlying reality for any human society, informing the myth structure of society and how a society interprets itself within the structure of reality. A distinction, however, can be made between two types of civil religion, namely, organic civil religion and contrived civil religion. An organic civil religion exists in a society when a socially binding myth structure develops over the course of several generations and serves to link society with a transcendent source of reality. A contrived civil religion, on the other hand, can be understood as the attempt by political theorists and political elites purposively to construct a socially binding myth structure to restore a civil religion whose tenets no longer hold influence over the society's population. A particular concern with the latter type is when such contrivances take on ideological implications and seek to identify the transcendent order, particularly as understood by Christian eschatology, with a concrete human society. Such

immanentism runs the danger of generating modern totalitarian ideologies, ideologies that seek to incorporate corrupted elements of Christian eschatology within human societies and thus create "heaven on earth."

The United States offers a convenient instance in which these two types of civil religion can be discerned and analyzed. The traditional American civil religion, which provided the myth structure for American society until the 1960s, can be understood as essentially organic in structure. Recent attempts to revive the traditional civil religion by American conservatives have, however, resulted in a contrivance that only appears to be a restoration of the traditional civil religion but, in reality, amounts to the establishment of an orthodoxy of a sectarian Protestant community drifting toward radical elements of Christian eschatology. This newly-institutionalized Protestant sectarianism, in turn, has been further radicalized around the notion that the United States embodies a certain divinely-ordained "destiny."

The world is his who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrowth error you behold is only there by sufferance—your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it a mortal blow.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar*

Style manual used: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Sixth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Computer software used: Microsoft WORD 2000.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

CIVIL RELIGION RECONSIDERED: THE SALIENCY OF A VENERABLE CONCEPT

> Though it is very important for man as an individual that his religion should be true, that is not the case for society. Society has nothing to fear or hope from another life; what is most important for it is not that all citizens profess the true religion, but that they should profess religion.
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

In the course of the investigation of political phenomena it is perhaps the more fundamental aspects of human behavior that get lost in the din and cacophony of academic specialization. Few can argue against the notion that in the United States, the present academic culture, in all of its diversity and specialization, is a rather fragmented environment, with any sort of "consilience" a far off, if not futile possibility;[1] that under the great bell-curve of "scientific" knowledge can be distinguished two great, if not radical, extremes: that of Enlightenment thinking, or the philosophical movement that initiated the modern era and held out promise of absolute knowledge, and Postmodern thinking, or the scheme of thought that questions all such knowledge—that all knowledge

[1] Edward O. Wilson writes, "The ongoing fragmentation of knowledge and the resulting chaos in philosophy are not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship. The key to unification is consilience," in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 8; see also, W. Whewell, *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences,* (London, 1847), 65-68.

is, at best, relative.[2] Nonetheless, this environment, with its emphasis on analytical rigor and methodological conformity, does hold out the promise of a truth, specifically, a "truth of society." Within intellectual circles, one may argue, there exists on one extreme, the conception of a society built almost entirely on human reason and effort alone—its truth is this: that mankind alone possess all that is needed to tame nature, both within and without the human individual, and thereby to construct rational institutions that will lead to inevitable human progress. Or on the other, that human society is a drifting, vulnerable phenomenon, subject to the vicissitudes of the natural or physical world, which in turn, can never be truly understood—its truth is this: there is no objective truth, only that for which the individual constructs for himself and, by way of persuasion, can get other to accept as well. In between the two extremes are societies in search of their own truth, societies undergoing their own self-interpretation, so to speak, experimenting here and there with mythical, religious, or ideological constructions in the attempt to bring order and meaning to a multitude of peoples lives. This truth is of no small importance.[3] When understood at its most fundamental level, such a truth is the

---

[2] See Wilson, "Back From Chaos", *The Atlantic Monthly,* March 1998, 58. As Wilson argues: "Enlightenment thinkers believed we can know everything, and radical post-modernists believe we can know nothing."

[3] John Maynard Keynes raises this sentiment to the level of a maxim in his well-known commentary on the impact "academic scribblers" and their ideas on a society's very self-conception. Speaking of the economic and political disarray of his time: "At the present moment people are unusually expectant of a more fundamental diagnosis; more particularly ready to receive it; eager to try it out, if it should be even plausible. But apart from this contemporary mood, the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil" (*The*

expression of a world-view that orders the untold lives of the individuals that comprise a society as well as shaping the foundation of society's institutions.

A truth of this sort, as embodied in a particular society, can be further understood in Hobbesian terms as an "organic" or "public" truth, in which what is best for society is none other than that certainty which supports the continued existence of society through the securing of "peace and concord"—generally in the face of competing and potentially destabilizing conceptions of truth.[4] Especially problematic are the attempts to disseminate a perceived "truth" of this sort by some degree of force or coercion, or perhaps, by appeal to emotion, and propagated as a universal value and equally applicable to all cultures. This truth, moreover, may be translated into all aspects of our contemporary social order—from the economic, to the social, to day-to-day politics, to the notion of bureaucratic expertise, and so forth. Crossing into the realm of such truth, one is confronted with that venerable concept of political phenomena, civil religion.[5] Generally speaking, civil religion is the commonly held religious world-view that binds citizens to the state and legitimates public institutions. But even more important for the

---

General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company 1935, 383-384.)

[4] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. MacPherson, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988), chap. 18; see also Eric Voegelin, *The Political Religions* 61-64, and *The New Science of Politics* 211-219, in *Modernity Without Restraint,* ed. Manfred Henningsen, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin vol. 5 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

[5] The terms "civil theology" and "civil religion" may be used interchangeably throughout this essay. However, civil theology does indicate the application of the concept to a broader theoretical range such as the study of the connections between political and religious ideas of complete societies or civilizations. Civil religion, on the other hand, is used primarily to indicate or refer to the civil theology of a specific political society. The latter is more in line with Robert Bellah's rendering of the subject in his essay "Civil Religion in America," *Dædalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967):1-21. At the start, this proposition of organicism and contrivance must be qualified, in that, human society with its vast array of institutions and conventions is, in itself, an artifact and did not spring forth independent of human efforts. It is enough at this junction, however, to posit that the symbols of political science do not always comport with symbols of social reality; rather, such symbols seek to illuminate a phenomenon not amiable to direct quantification.

proceeding study, when one analyzes the history and application of this concept further, one is confronted with potentially differing types of civil religion, types that can be conceived as either of the *organic* or *contrived* type. Hence, any analysis of civil religion and the truth such a set of symbols ostensibly provides to society can and should proceed with this key distinction and differentiation in mind.

The "truth of society," that is, the specific truth a society embodies through its own self-interpretation (whether its citizens are fully conscious of its existence or not) thus forms an essential aspect of any social order.[6] This truth will determine, among other things, how social institutions are articulated and manifested in the real world, how patterns of authority are established and resources are distributed throughout society, how social roles are generated and maintained, and so forth. But perhaps more important is the role civil religion plays in determining the myth structure of a society and how such myths play out in the actions and experiences of the political society in question and the truth implicit in this myth structure. Due to the implications of these experiences, how this truth is ultimately formulated deserves the full attention of the student of politics. Specifically, one may ask, is such truth the natural (organic) outgrowth of trial and error experience, developed by way of the evolution of human thought over generations and reflected in society's social institutions? Or is it the result of a deliberate or contrived project of an enlightened mind or minds, imposed on a society in order to establish peace and concord, maintain the status quo, restore past glory, and so forth? (Or in utilizing Plato's analysis, by those who have left the cave of shadows and have looked upon, and gained an understanding of, the source that illuminates all truth—"Guardians" so to

[6] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 27ff., 52ff., 80ff., 184ff.

speak.) At first glance, both types seem to provide the rationale for social order. But are they of the same quality? Moreover, how does this rationale for social order translate into the concept of civil religion itself? Can civil religion be understood in these terms, or is it merely the vestiges and accoutrements of a mature political society used simply to rally the citizenry during times of crisis or celebration?[7]

The United States offers a convenient instance in which these questions can be put to the test, in that two distinct types of civil religion can be discerned and elicited within the American experience; namely, one in which civil religion can be understood as a natural outgrowth of the life-cycle of American political society, the other, a deliberate contrivance of a civil religion—or the attempt thereof—by intellectual elites to repair what they see as the rending of the American social fabric, a decline in America's global leadership, and so forth. With these considerations in mind the thesis of this study can be articulated as following: In the United States, the contemporary manifestation of civil religion reveals two related, yet functionally different civil theologies, one representing an older, more venerable tradition, the other a recent contrivance whose function is largely a restorative program, initiated by conservative intellectual elites to offset a perceived decline in American hegemony—a decline involving a number of variables, including the strategic, moral, economic, cultural, social, and so forth. Part of this agenda can be ascribed to a highly influential group of conservative thinkers, the neoconservatives, who have gained ascendancy in American policy circles. Building on the work of Leo Strauss, these thinkers seek to arrest American decline in the wake of "modernity" by revitalizing the spiritual core of America's public sphere and breathing

[7] See Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America." *Dædalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

life into what the see as the "myth" of America.[8] Much of their project to arrest American decline can be understood as the attempt to reconstruct a viable civil theology, much in the manner of the type originally delineated by the classical Greek philosopher Plato, for the great and diverse mass of American citizens. In this sense, the evolution, or one might say, the devolution, of the American civil theology is the primary emphasis of this study. Specifically, that while attempting to craft a civil theology that at first glance would appear to be a restoration of the older, traditional American civil religion, in reality, the project engendered by American conservative intellectuals has resulted in none other than the establishment of an orthodoxy of a sectarian Protestant community, tilted as it were, toward the radical elements of Christian eschatological fulfillment. The extreme outcome of this endeavor is the drift toward a form of American totalitarianism that, while relatively benign in substance when compared to twentieth-century totalitarianism, does share a similar form and similar characteristics of past ideological/immanentist movements, seen most readily in the idea of a soteriological or salvational role for the United States. One may ask, therefore, why did one generation of neoconservatives shift their emphasis from arresting moral and spiritual decline at home, a condition that earlier neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol had surely diagnosed in all its due seriousness, toward the radical agenda of a spiritually-energized United States with a renewed "calling" and mission to democratize the world? It is important to point out that this drift toward a radical American civil theology is merely a tendency and does not reflect the public agenda of the American nation as a whole. Nevertheless, the purveyors of this new civil theology have become highly influential in the nation's policy

[8] See Irving Kristol, *Neo-Conservativism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher; 1st Elephant Paperback edition, 1999), 6-9, 187-188.

circles and their ideas can be seen in policies designed to spread American-style political, economic, and social institutions abroad—policies, in effect, design to reshape the world in America's image.

Finally, it is important to point out that an examination of civil religion is, essentially, an examination of political representation; specifically, in civil religion's linking of the mystical or mythic elements of a political society with its tangible, mundane political institutions. In this sense, a society can be seen as representing a transcendent truth, the cosmic or natural order or, perhaps, God's plan for human redemption, the latter to be carried out by God's human agents. When viewed in a critical light, much that can be construed as political theorizing in modern Western thought, is none other than various attempts to formulate a civil theology for the masses of the Western states as theorists took careful steps to construct a social theory to ameliorate the tension between the sacred and profane, the spiritual and secular, and so forth. Hobbes's theory of representation, *Leviathan*, as we will see, can be understood in these terms, in that, Hobbes recognized the significant disruptions that can occur if spiritual movements were not kept in check (and more particularly, if their dogma was not carefully circumscribed) by secular authority. Consequently, in order to understand the phenomenon of representation it is imperative to gain an understanding of how the social phenomenon of civil religion, much like a religious creed binding the individual to the divine, functions to bind the members of a polity into a viable civil association thus forming various degrees of political representation. This binding is more than mere political obligation, but rather, rises to the level in which mystical or mythological elements compel members of society to act in accordance with the prevailing myth

structure.[9] It is by way of this materializing of a socio-political unit or citizenry, that the articulation of some form of representation becomes possible—and, it might be added, for theorists to classify such representation. This citizenry may be homogeneous or differentiated by various characteristics, yet its primary quality is that it forms and maintains a contiguous whole; for again, before the differentiation and classification of various instances of representation is possible (including popular understandings of political representation), a population must be unified into a recognizable political unit. And it is important to point out, that even within modern, secularized states, it is a religious factor that largely functions to bind members of a population into a representable body—that is, a meeting of two types of social order, the mystical-religious and the rational-legal (or positive) elements of its constitution. Accordingly, in distinguishing civil religion as a unique social phenomenon, it becomes necessary to demonstrate that the phenomenon in question displays both a religious and law-like function in affecting individual and collective behavior.

PLATONIC CIVIL THEOLOGY: CIVIL RELIGION AS THE BINDING ELEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In seeking to understand the recent project to contrive a civil theology for American political society, one must recognize the genesis of the concept in the writings of Plato, for it is Plato who came to dominate the thought of Leo Strauss and many of his intellectual heirs. Plato differentiates a *civil theology* (*theologia civilis*) proper, as a mean between *mythological theology* (or mythic-religious) and *philosophical theology* (with its

[9] Cf., C.B Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, (Oxford University Press, 1961), 70-87.

emphasis on the life of reason to understand questions concerning the cosmic or divine order, the discovery of rational tenets of justice, and the role of the state in establishing order and applying justice by way of legislating and decision-making).[10] Plato argues that this civil theology is the meeting point between the two extremes, a contrived civil religion that seeks to establish and maintain public order in the face of the seemingly irrational and hyper-rational vagaries between the mythological and philosophic theologies—with the former embodying fantastic, unrealistic accounts of reality, while the latter being, by and large, based on intellectual pursuits, beyond the cognitive capacities of the general public. In short, Plato's civil theology represents the establishment of an *orthodoxy* of beliefs and behavior,[11] the function of which is to facilitate the harmonization of purpose between both myth and law, "the principle doctrines" of which, in the words of Ellis Sandoz, "are outlined by Socrates-Plato, the philosopher-legislator, and then incorporated into mythic accounts in the dialogues by Socrates-Plato, the poet."[12] The rationale of Plato's civil theology, then, is to bind individuals into a functional civil society by guiding and directing their behavior by means of both positive law and by the elucidation of a viable civic mythology (including Plato's renowned "noble" falsehoods or lies), thereby setting the populace in their proper place within society and society within a larger framework of cosmic-divine order.[13]

---

[10] Plato, *The Republic,* 376c-ff; *s*ee also Ellis Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors," *The Journal of Politics* 34, no.1 (1972) 4-6, for an elaboration of this development.

[11] Orthodoxy in this sense can be understood in terms of the Greek *orthós* meaning "right" or "correct", and *dóxa* meaning "belief" or "opinion." Correct in opinion, however, still reveals a degree uncertainty and requires conformity in order to achieve desirable social results.

[12] Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 5.

[13] See, Plato, *Republic*, 414-415.

Plato's formulations are a fundamental starting point for an analysis into the link between religion and law—the corollary of which is social order. Accordingly, Plato's formulations will prove exceedingly important in distinguishing between organic, spontaneously engendered civil religion, and purposive, contrived civil religion. But perhaps the clearest and most succinct of the earliest formulations concerning the link between religion and law and, hence, the binding of civil society, is provided by St. Thomas Aquinas. As Aquinas initially reveals in the *Summa Theologica*, religion and law are two concepts that have a similar history and etymological meaning: "Law is a rule and measure of acts whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting; for *lex* (law) is derived from *ligare* (to bind), because it binds one to act." Similarly, the term religion is derived from the Latin *religāre*, indicating the action of binding, and more specifically, a continuous binding—hence, the prefix *re-*. But Aquinas's formulation is neither as clear nor as succinct as it may first appear. For Aquinas adds "reason" to supplement *religāre* as the basis for social order: "in order that the volition of what is commanded may have the nature [or, essence] of law, it needs to be in accord with some rule of reason."[14] Reason, according to Aquinas, is required to sort through competing claims to obedience. It is necessary to link individual citizens to one another and the citizen to the state, in order to achieve, at the least, relative peace and harmony in a way recognized as legitimate by the citizens. Hence, Aquinas's analysis turns to the role of reason in relation to the question of the various kinds of law at the disposal of human

[14] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in J.H. Hexter ed., *The Traditions of Human Thought* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1968) 234.

law-makers—whether there is an eternal law, a natural law, a human law, a divine law (one or several), or whether there is a law of sin.[15]

From this cursory analysis of Aquinas's thought we can formulate a rudimentary conceptual definition for the concept of civil religion: civil religion indicates the capacity to bind citizens, the *cìvitâs,* together into a meaningful political community (i.e. binding citizen to citizen and citizen to state), and indicates a social phenomenon that serves as a rule and a measure of behavior—by way of the *religāre* and by reason—directing the general course of society and its particular manifestations of power, authority, and politics. A series of broad questions can thus be initially formulated: how do political societies come to represent themselves in relation to these variables (i.e. power, authority, and politics), with civil religion becoming the concrete manifestation of these correlations, binding citizens together and directing individual and collective behavior? More importantly, are expressions of civil religion *organic* developments or *contrived* projects; that is, are they the result of a process of spontaneous social development or the deliberate ideological creation of human minds? And in regard to the United States, what is the quality and character of the civil religion as established and revealed in the American republic? How was it established, by organic development or by contrivance? And, moreover, what truth does it embody?

These and similar questions will be addressed throughout the course of the analysis, the end result of which, is to better understand fundamentals of human political behavior. In a sense, it will be claimed that civil religion is a clear note that rings through analysis of social phenomena. Again, the resulting manifestations of civil religion, both

[15] Ibid. 234-242

in the more general aspects and in regard to the United States in particular, are revealed in the internal decision-making processes, social behaviors, institutions, and so forth, and in external projections stimulated by this phenomenon by way of the institutions of the state.

CIVIL RELIGION AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL SOCIETY: BEYOND BELLAH

Civil religion, thus formulated, plays a significant part in society's ends, albeit ends often determined in large part by the purveyors of contrivance. The means chosen to fulfill these ends reflect these guiding principles and will determine, in varying degrees and according to the intensity of such beliefs, how these ends will be fulfilled—e.g. by gentle persuasion (soft power) or, by some degree of coercion (hard power).[16] Civil religion, in this respect, represents the major part of the collective social ethos, the master element of a compound, ideational constitution of social order. Civil religion is a mere part of the ethos in that there are other elements that facilitate the determination of societal ends, some of which are the mere cultural vestiges of venerable institutions, such as the Church, moral codes, or legal systems, while other elements represent competing internal representations of truth in conflict with the civil religion—such as philosophy, ideology, political culture, sub-cultures, popular culture, and so forth. These and other similar elements can bring harmony or discord, support or conflict, discourse or obfuscation, to the sum of ideas operating within a given society. Nevertheless, the power inherent in such an ethos is driven in great part by the master element, the civil

[16] See Joseph Nye's examination of the notion of "hard" versus "soft power" in "The Changing Nature of World Power." *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 2 (Summer, 1990). 177-192.

religion, and it is with this latter phenomenon and the overriding truth that it imparts on a society that this study is primarily concerned.

Civil religion can be roughly conceived then, as the ideational core—or nucleus—around which the constituent elements orbit. Both sets of objects exert some degree of influence on the other (imagine if you will, the moon's influence on the earth's tides and the forces that hold the moon in orbit around the earth), but it is the primary object, in this case civil religion, that remains the definitive shaper of society.

In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between civil religion and political representation, we must understand both the *procedures* and the *substance* of representation. According to political theorist Eric Voegelin, representation can be conceived in three ways, elemental, existential, and transcendental.[17] The first can be understood as encompassing the procedures of representation, while the latter two encompass the substance of representation. In view of the conflict of the various types of political regimes and their claim to "representativeness," Voegelin writes, "the procedure of representation is meaningful only when certain requirements concerning its substance are fulfilled and that the establishment of the procedure does not automatically provide the desired substance."[18]

In common usage, "representation" refers to characteristics of the apparent or external existence of modern Western political societies (i.e., we speak of representative institutions, constituencies, the voting behavior of the electorate, campaign and lobbying finance reform, etc). Elemental representation is just that, the elements that comprise the

[17] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 109ff.

[18] Ibid., 115-116.

formal political institutions of representative systems. It can be argued, moreover, that contemporary political science remains as concentrated in our own time, as it was in Voegelin's writing, in examining the elemental aspects of political societies at the expense of more substantial concerns. In other words, political science, particularly in the United States, does not make a concerted effort to plumb the depths of political societies to examine what illuminates them from within. Rather, the discipline places undue emphasis on the examination of the behavior of political actors, the "inputs" of the policy process, and so forth.

Representation in the *existential* sense, then, is a starting point for understanding the substance of a political society. "In order to representative," Voegelin writes, "it is not enough for a government to be representative in the constitutional sense (our elemental type of representative institutions); it must be also be representative in the existential sense of realizing the idea of the institution."[19] In this way theorists are better able to understand the existential crises that confront a political society, one of which is the crisis of authority. As Voegelin adds, "if a government is nothing but representative in the constitutional sense, a representative ruler in the existential sense will sooner or later make an end of it; and quite possibly the new existential ruler will not be too representative in the constitutional sense."[20]

Accordingly, existential representation is best understood as representation as it actually is, as opposed to representation as it claims to be—of *de facto* representation as opposed to *de jure* representation. Voegelin describes existential representation in terms

[19] Ibid., 126.

[20] Ibid.

of society in terms of a "society in form for action in history," as the society articulates a distinct sovereign center and can conceivable pass through an initial integration phase, an epochal phase, and the phase in which society undergoes disintegration. Existential representation specifically engenders: (1) *articulation*, or the initial process in which people form themselves into a society for action with the formation of a de-facto sovereign and leadership; (2) *obedience*, or the notion that the de-facto leadership finds habitual obedience for their acts of command—these acts serve the existential needs of society; and (3) *authority,* or the notion that the acts of the representatives are not imputed to themselves but to society as a whole—their declarations have obligatory force. In the latter, "representative" and "agent" are distinguished as two distinct types of authority. An agent, for instance, acts under specific instructions from the "principle," while a representative has power to act for a society by virtue of his position in the structure of the community. Existential representation thus entails political representation in the elemental sense, along with social and political articulation into a unified whole. As Voegelin writes, "Articulation, thus, is the condition of representation. In order to come into existence, a society must articulate itself by producing a representative that will act for it."[21]

In addition to the elemental and existential representation described above, there is also a more fundamental type of representation, namely, *transcendental* representation. Representation of this type occurs when a political society articulates a hierarchy of representation in which the divine or cosmic order is symbolized in the form of a concrete human society—with the added understanding that in certain situations, each

[21] Ibid., 120.

member of society, down to its lowest social groupings, represents different aspects of that order.[22] Consequently, the "truth of society" is embodied in a very literal sense, namely, as an immanent, universal truth revealed in a human social order. This type of representation can be, and indeed has been, manifest in varying degrees throughout human history. Ancient China, for instance, symbolized the "mandate" of heaven, with the Temple of Heaven (*Tian Tan*) in Beijing as the center of the cosmos and the Chinese people (*Zhong Guo*, or "center people") the center of the cosmic order. The United States, on the other hand, represents divine truth in a different manner, particularly in terms of a covenantal nation along the lines of ancient Israel. American symbolism focuses on the early European immigrants as a "New Israel," and a nation set apart by God, for God's greater purpose.

As we will see, this notion of transcendent representation can be carried over into the understanding of competing conceptions of truth. Voegelin sees this conflict over universal truth in the historic shift in cognitive orientation among human societies: for example, from an understanding of the temporal sphere of power as the representative of divine authority (characteristic of ancient pagan cultures and cosmic empires); to the advent of philosophy and its emphasis on human reason as the basis of truth and temporal authority (characteristic of the Greco-Roman world); to the impact of Christianity and an understanding of the world in which any notion of divinity within the temporal or mundane sphere (as in animism) has been, for the most part, de-divinized and is suspect (St. Augustine's duel-system of sacred and profane spheres of existence characterizes this mode of representation); to the modern era, with its corruption of Christian symbolism

[22] Ibid., 129-148.

(namely, in the form of transferring notions of divinity to humanity itself—or the profane sphere—with the concomitant concept of self-salvation as seen in the various nineteenth and twentieth century ideologies). The latter development represents the divine order, albeit in a highly modified form, coming full-circle and manifest in a political society, the function of which, is to achieve salvation within the temporal sphere of existence—as opposed to being merely a model or exemplar of the cosmic order.[23] More importantly, the overall shifts in representation represent in turn, a shift in the ordering paradigm of society, as older truths and their attendant symbols are no longer adequate to explain the vicissitudes of human realty. This can be understood as "experiential atrophy," and will figure into how a society's re-orients itself toward the grander questions of existence.

This understanding of civil religion as essential to questions concerning the various forms of representation takes the analysis of the American civil religion beyond that introduced by Robert Bellah in his important essay "Civil Religion in America."[24] In the essay, Bellah draws attention to the American civil religion and its manifestation as a unique a set of "beliefs, symbols, and rituals" displayed during periods of national celebration and crisis.[25] (These ideas will be further explored in chapter 3.) Rather, the study of the American civil religion must also include two crucial characteristics that go beyond Bellah's initial analysis: (1) an inclusion of the Platonic understanding of civil theology, that is, the *theologia civilis*, as a mean between a purely myth-based phenomenon and a purely philosophic phenomenon—in this way, one is better able to

---

[23] See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), for a full treatment of this theme.

[24] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Dædalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 1-21.

[25] Ibid. 24.

understand the impact of Straussian political thinking, with its emphasis on Platonic thought, on his intellectual heirs; and (2), a broader understanding of "representation," particularly transcendent representation, and its emphasis of a society embodying a higher truth. From these two additions it becomes possible to understand the process of the contrivance of a new, or perhaps, revitalized, civil religion for American society in order to arrest perceived social decline.

MAN AND HIS CONTRIVANCES

As stated above, this study of civil religion is focused on two types of civil religion; namely the organic and the contrived. However, before proceeding to an examination of the differentiation of these two types in the American case, it is important to understand contrivance versus organicism in human society and the impact the resulting phenomena have on social order. Contrivance, in its simplest sense, can be understood as the "act" of planning, particularly planning with a knowledgeable or ingenious end in mind. In this sense, almost all aspects of human society are in one way or another contrivances or artifacts of human creation. One can add persuasion to the conceptual definition, in that part of purpose of the purveyors of contrivance is to persuade others to accept the particular truth embodied in the contrivance in order to establish some sort of concrete manifestation of such truth. This persuasion may be seemingly innocuous, as in the gradual ceding of authority to bureaucrats and other specialists, or it may be antagonistic, as seen in revolutionary Marxist doctrine. In either case, contrivance represents the melding of thought and action. Accordingly, as a

consequence of the *faculty* of rationality, mankind is particularly apt to contrivance.[26] As R.M MacIver writes, "with the aid of his pragmatic contrivances man has outdistanced all other animals and made himself lord of creation."[27] In a word, contrivance represents power. It is Nietzsche who reminds us that it is the will to power is the basic disposition that manifests itself in all aspects of human life, as well as the natural world in general.

Man has certainly left his creative mark on the earth, though this mark is not always the mark of beneficence. Every perceived step forward in technology is generally accompanied by unanticipated consequences of both the material and ethical kind—so the title of "lord of creation" maybe a little off in its accolades. Nevertheless, MacIver does distinguish the concept of contrivance in a particularly useful light, namely, by differentiating two broad classes of contrivances utilized by mankind, "technique" and "myth." MacIver defines technique as the aggregate of devices and skills that has enabled humankind to organize things—including fellow human beings—in ways that are more appealing, including such values as efficiency, utility, want-satisfaction, economic and political advantage, and so on. "A technique," writes MacIver, "is way of knowing that is primarily a *way of control"* (emphasis mine).[28] It is not merely the instrument or tool of human artifice; rather, technique is the "craft" that humankind employs in devising its tools, machinery, scientific methodology, ideology, and so forth. "A technique," MacIver adds, "is a way of *manipulating* objects, including persons as

---

[26] It is important to distinguish rationality as a faculty (or inherent capacity or ability) from rationalism as a philosophical doctrine. Rationalism in the latter sense, is the theory that the exercise of reason—as opposed to empiricism, charismatic or traditional authority, or spiritual revelation—provides the only valid basis for knowledge, action or belief and that reason is the principal source of both scientific knowledge and of spiritual truth.

[27] R.M. MacIver, *The Web of Government*, (New York: The Free Press, 1965) 3-4.

[28] Ibid., 4.

objects. It is knowledge compactly applied to the world of objects, changing the relation of the subject and the object in a direction desired by the subject" (emphasis mine).[29] Technique, then, is a unique faculty utilized by *Homo sapiens* to cope with the uncertainties of life in the physical world, a world that is often hostile and seemingly unwelcoming, including the actions of fellow human beings.

In addition to technique, MacIver posits the human contrivance of "myth" or the "value-impregnated beliefs and notions that men hold, that they live by or live for."[30] Myths inform all aspects of a human society's action in history, binding citizen to citizen in a meaningful community, and with the emergence of the complex political organization and nationalism, citizen to state. According to MacIver,

> Every society is held together by a myth-system, a complex of dominating thought-forms that determines and sustains all its activities. … Every civilization, every period, every nation, has its characteristic myth-complex. In it lies the secret of social unities and social continuities, and its changes compose the inner history of every society. Wherever he goes, whatever he encounters, man spins about him his web of myth. … Every individual spins his own variant within the greater web of the whole group. The myth mediates between man and nature. From the shelter of his myth he perceives and experiences the world. Inside his own myth he is at home in his world.[31]

Social relations, as well as society's relation to nature, are thus born of myths and sustained by myths. Institutional arrangements are in turn governed by the course of myths and the degree of their transparency or opaqueness—that is, to what degree do they offer a clear insight for those who embody the myths, or the degree to which the myths obscure the underlying themes of reality, thus hindering the formation and sustentation of social relations. The truth or falsity of the particular myth-system is not

---

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

the question here; rather, the concern at this stage is with how myth functions to bind and sustain social relations, whether the myth proceeds from the deepest of philosophical insights—as with say Plato's "anthropological principle"—or whether it is based on simple interpretation of the natural world as with animism or cosmological myths.

Needless to say, myths are not immutable. Rather, myths are subject to the vicissitudes of time and circumstance, and as myths change so do techniques. The reverse is also true; as techniques changes, myths are pulled along in-tow, and must adapt in order to stave off experiential atrophy and opaqueness. The primary function of myths, however, remains the same; that is, "to turn valuations into propositions about the nature of things."[32] Myths serve to "ratify" values and to appropriate them within the greater scheme of things. In more complex societies myths attain more content and explanatory power about the nature of things. "Social myth," MacIver explains, "the myth that pervades every type and stage of society, [gains] more content and more rationalization in the more advanced forms."[33] This advanced form of myth translates into a specific type of social order—and importantly, a specific personality type of the members of society. For social myths, at whichever stage a society achieves, "enjoins some kind of order among men, and enshrines that order in a context of value-impregnated lore and legend, in tradition and philosophy."[34] And with the aid of institutionalized authority, the values purveyed by the myth-structure are highly influential on the political order—a scheme in which the value-impregnated myths engender authority, with authority, in turn, essential to the continuing viability of myth.

---

[32] Ibid., 30.

[33] Ibid., 32.

[34] Ibid.

Hence, "at the core of every myth-structure," MacIver concludes, "lies the myth of authority."[35]

If the core of the myth-structure is authority, then social order is predicated upon a viable myth and its account of the justification and legitimization of authority. Social myths as "dominating thought-forms" thus form the foundation of political power, our fundamental social force. Moreover, as contrivances created to turn values into propositions concerning the nature of things, myths may be manipulated for pragmatic purposes. Plato, for example, recognized the importance of myth (i.e. noble falsehoods) in securing order to the point where it was imperative for rulers to contrive myths necessary for both domestic tranquility and the common defense: "To the rulers of the state then, if to any, it belongs of right to use falsehood, to deceive either enemies or their own citizens, for the good of the state: and no one else may meddle with this privilege."[36] Or again, "We ought to esteem it of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue."[37] Plato's civil theology, as we have seen, represents the mean between a purely mythological theology and philosophical theology. The Greek philosophical enterprise, understood in terms of contrivance, may shed light on recent attempts to cope with contemporary problems of social order.

For the ancient Greeks, everything worth doing is worth doing well—and by extension, Plato developed his philosophy as a technical skill, or *techne*. Moreover, in the quest to establish a good society, goodness itself was conceived as a skill. In this

---

[35] Ibid., 30.

[36] Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 3, sct. 389.

[37] Plato, *The Republic*, Bk. 2, sct. 378.

sense, goodness has an active quality: to be good was to do good things, to be considered good was to be seen doing good things, and hence, good men would be known by their works. The ancient virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance thus have a technical dimension. These virtues requires practice (as per skill—or *techne*), and hence, virtues were to be internalized so as they became second nature. Is it possible then, for "dominating thought-forms" to be contrived to address the issue of the breakdown of the myth structure and to reconstitute a viable civil theology for "modern" American political society? For critics of modernity, namely, neoconservatives with their Straussian appeal, the Platonic approach may be one such golden road to a reconstitution of social order. Against this understanding, however, must be presented an organic understanding of political society, an understanding that informed both classical political theory and modern conservative thought.

ORGANICISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Humanity's contrivances of technique and myth indicate the human propensity toward artifice and the social construction of reality. On the other hand, there remains Aristotle's notion of man as a political "animal" along with the natural aspects of human political societies—that is, the naturalness of the polis. As Aristotle famously declares, "it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal."[38] As such, any analysis of human behavior must inevitably take into consideration the "natural" aspects of human societies and the extent to which humans

[38] Aristotle, *Politics,* bk. 1, ch. 2, sct. 1253a; cf., Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 129ff.

exist within the natural world as mere biological animals. A biological or organic metaphor of human political society forms the basis of classical natural right, as seen in a natural hierarchy of ends, individuals, and even societies. But nature can also be viewed as a limitation on human ingenuity and capacity. "The natural, merely social companionship of the human species," writes Hannah Arendt, "was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for human life as for other forms of animal life."[39] To what extent can human social order be consider "organic" in constitution and still be viable as far as not being a limitation? Such an understanding is essential to questions concerning the nature and function of the American civil religion.

As we will see, the organic metaphor of society extends from the classical period up through the modern era. Just exactly what is meant by organic, however, becomes problematic in itself. For the classical philosophers, as organic society can be understood in terms of classical natural right; that is, a natural hierarchy exists in society in which each level forms part of the organic whole.[40] Aristotle's natural polis and political man, for instance, corresponds to this understanding, for it is Aristotle who argues that it is evident that the "city exists by nature, and that a human being is by nature a political animal."[41] Moreover, this understanding is couched in terms of individuals participating in a meaningful political community, where an objective standard of the good, happiness, justice, and so forth, is secured: that is, as natural political animals, "they are brought together by their common interests in proportion as they severally attain to any measure

[39] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 24.

[40] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a20-40, 1261a10-16, 1278b1830; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1132b33.

[41] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a1-2.

of well-being."[42] Classical republicanism is built largely on this conception of political life, and the early political experience in the United States can be understood as embodying these tenets of classical republicanism to some degree. Alexis de Tocqueville, for instance, writes of the great strength of American society and the American people in terms of its classical republican roots.[43] Moreover, Tocqueville seems impressed by the affinity between religion and politics displayed by the Americans: "alongside every religion lies some political opinion which is linked to it by affinity."[44] This affinity, moreover, appears to be given without qualification:

> Among the Anglo-Americans there are some who profess Christian dogmas out of belief, others because they are afraid they may appear to lack belief. So Christianity reigns without obstacles by universal consent; … the result is that in the world of morality everything is definite and settled, although the world of politics is given over to debate and human experiment.[45]

Another understanding of society as organic society is found in the "modern" conception of the universe, the natural world, human society, and even the human individual in purely natural terms, particularly in a mechanistic-materialistic manner. Building on the work of thinkers such as René Descartes and the ubiquitous influence of the Enlightenment, early modern thinkers applied Newton's laws of physics to all aspects of human affairs. The human body, for instance, was conceived as a machine with the passions serving as the vital springs of human behavior, supplementing reason as the unique faculty of the natural human—i.e., both the both the passions and reason implanted by nature. Montesquieu extends these ideas to the political society.

---

[42] Ibid., 1278b23.

[43] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Ch. 3, 66-67; Ch. 5, 71ff; Ch. 9, 323-370; Vol. 2, Ch. 8, 521-523.

[44] Ibid., Vol. 1, Ch. 9, 336.

[45] Ibid., Vol. 1 , Ch. 9, 341.

Montesquieu focuses on the vital springs of government (i.e., a "general spirit"); that is, each form of government has its principle, its nature, and its object—with "principle" indicating the spirit guiding government, its "nature" indicating its structure and form, and its object revealing its "ends." Montesquieu was interested in how "power" is exercised in differing polities, going beyond structure and form, and this is revealed at its most fundamental level, the climate in which the polity exists. State and society thus exist in an organic relationship.

Liberalism, in its own fashion, extends this organic analogy in its explication of a series of interlocking harmonies in the human world predicated upon Newton's Laws, the notion of a self-regulated universe, and an inherent natural goodness of man (i.e., Locke's "natural reason"). As such, it argues that a minimal state is all that is needed to govern human affairs—once the dismantling of the ancient systems of authority is completed of course. In addition, liberalism posits the existence of a spontaneously arising social order. In an era of increasing secularization, for instance, the question inevitably arose, if not God, what is the basis of order? Liberalism answered this question with the resolution that social order arises independently of human will or reflection, as with the Newtonian laws of the universe. Since human behavior is law-like—that is, human behavior can be understood as operating according to general, fixed-laws of human nature—such "laws" imply that there is a natural harmony in the in the social world that operates in very much the same way that as there is a harmonious order in the natural world. According to this line of argument, then, there is no need for contrived, artificial constructions of authority—namely, hierarchical, religious institutions and hereditary authority. Humanity can do quite well with "limited government" in conjunction with the

freedom to barter and exchange as per each individual's self-interests, self-realization, and natural reason dictates.

In contrast to the Enlightenment's and the French Revolution's radical organicism, Edmund Burke offers an understanding of society, if not quite organic in certain terms, can be best understood as a spiritually unified whole.[46] Burke's analysis of society, while sharing similar features, is noticeably different from the natural society put forward by Plato and Aristotle. Society, for Burke, is best conceived in a qualifiedly organic manner in that he contrasts this conception of society with that of the artificial society—or that society conceived and constructed solely on the pillars of reason.[47] "Society," argues Burke, "is not made, it grows; and by ways as dark and mysterious as those which from its earliest germ conduct and limit the destination of life in the individual."[48] Moreover, society can be understood as a partnership, or a "contract" if you will; however, the partnership extends beyond the span of the immediate parties involved, "it becomes a partnership between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are unborn."[49] Or as Russell Kirk elaborates: "Society is a partnership of the dead, the living, and the unborn. Mutilate the roots of society and tradition and the

---

[46] See Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke To Eliot*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 1986), 20, in which Kirk argues that the "organic" metaphor should be used with caution when applied to Burke's thought: "Certain writers who ought to know better are fond of saying that Burke considered society an "organism"—a term redolent of positivism and biological evolution. In actuality, Burke was careful not to bind himself by that rash analogy. He spoke of society as a *spiritual unity* [emphasis original], an eternal partnership, a corporation which is always perishing and yet always renewing, very like that other perpetual corporation and unity, the church."

[47] Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society: or, a View of the Miseries and Evils arising to Mankind from every Species of Artificial Society*, Ed. Frank N. Pagano (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1982).

[48] Edmond Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke, 3 vols. (Payne Ed.)* (1874-1878), Volume II: "Reflections on the Revolution in France," 43.

[49] Edmund Burke, *An Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs,* in Ritchie, ed., *Further Reflections on* the Revolution in France, pp. 168–69.

result must inevitably be the isolation of individuals from their fellow men, and the creation of sprawling, faceless masses."[50]

Thus, all parts of the spiritually unified society work together, including church and state. Burke's "decent drapery of life" is comprised of both ecclesiastical and civil authority, each complimenting each other and forming essential aspects of the whole:

> Civil Government borrows a Strength from ecclesiastical; and artificial Laws receive a Sanction from artificial Revelations. The Ideas of Religion and Government are closely connected; and whilst we receive Government as a thing necessary, or even useful to our Well-being, we shall in spite of us draw in, as a necessary, tho' undesirable Consequence, an artificial Religion of some kind or other.[51]

Radical democratic ideology (the "enlightened" ideology goading the French revolutionaries in 1789, for instance), represented the attempt to construct an artificial society and the contrivance of an artificial religion to supplement civil government. "In a Christian Commonwealth," however, "Church and the State are one and the same thing, being different integral parts of the same whole."[52] Thus, for Burke, Church and state exist in a seamless, unified manner, not far removed from one another.

But religion for Burke does not consist simply of pleasing illusions; that is, of those noble falsehoods or contrivances of orthodox beliefs conducive to social order. As Russell Kirk explains, "Burke does not approve of religion because it is a bulwark of order; instead, he says that mundane order is derived from, and remains a part of divine order."[53] In this sense, Burke reflects the arguments of Aristotle and the Schoolman in

---

[50] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 483.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Edmond Burke, *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians,* in *The Works of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (London: Rivington, 1812), 10:44.

[53] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 32.

his perception as to the constitution of mundane order in terms of attunement to a higher, transcendent order. "Religion is not merely a convenient myth to keep popular appetites within bounds," Kirk adds:

> [Burke] had no sympathy with Polybius' suggestion that the ancients invented religion to save men from anarchy, or with Plato's willingness to create religious mythology out of whole cloth so that man will reverence the established order in the illusion that it was ordained from the very beginnings of things. Politics and morals, Burke saw, are deduced from belief or skepticism; men never really succeed in convincing themselves of the realty of things supernatural merely to sustain things natural.[54]

Political and ethical principles, for Burke, are drawn from the general, that is, the divine order, and applied to the particular, concrete society. Burke's spiritually unified society, then, contrasts with attempts to contrive a social order based on some sort of convenient or pragmatic myth, whether in the form of Plato's noble falsehoods or Rousseau's "civil religion."

The contrast between the two types of political society, specifically, that of the spiritually unified and the artificial society is of great significance, in that for Burke and other conservatives, the ends of the state are divinely inspired, with the function of the state is nothing less than the perfection of human nature. As Burke argues: "He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection—He willed therefore the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection."[55] Burke's analogy can thus be summarized as following:

---

[54] Ibid.

[55] Edmund Burke, *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws,* in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1981), 194-195; This corresponds with the classical republicanism of Aristotle: "Nor was civil society founded merely to preserve the lives of its members; but that they might live well. … nor is it an alliance mutually to defend each other from

> Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupenduous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy.[56]

Hence, every state is the product of Providence—with Christianity being the logical conclusion to human spiritual development, but certainly not the only valid profession of piety. As Kirk explains, "Christianity is the highest of religions; but every sincere creed is a recognition of divine purpose in the universe, and all mundane order is dependent upon reverence for the religious creed which a people have inherited from their fathers."[57]

This view of social order is a far cry from the mechanistic-materialistic worldview of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's God was a standoffish God, aloof from Creation; Providence is transferred to humanity itself by way of the subjection of *Fortuna*. Tolerance, rather than piety, becomes a central virtue of liberalism's social order—a tolerance of a multitude of conceptions of the divine, the good, the just, and so forth, conceptions potentially as varied as there were individuals. Moreover, liberal thought would evolve into the radical *laissez-faire* and "Social Darwinism" of Herbert Spenser and William Graham Sumner, a situation in which the mechanistic-materialistic

---

injuries, or for a commercial intercourse. . . . But whosoever endeavors to establish wholesome laws in a state, attends to the virtues and vices of each individual who composes it; from whence it is evident, that the first care of him who would found a city, truly deserving that name, and not nominally so, must be to have his citizens virtuous" (Aristotle, *Politics,* bk. 3, ch. 9, sct. 1280).

[56] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," 98.

[57] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 33.

organicism reached its apogee of natural selection, significantly divergent from the notion of the virtue promoting state of Aristotle or Burke.

But whereas tolerance forms a central premise in the liberal conception of the good society, for Burke, prejudice precedes tolerance—if the latter can be tolerated at all. And an absolute conception of the good, if it serves the purpose of the preservation of social order would not necessarily be harmful in itself. In Burke's conception, God, nature and society all form a unitary whole, the order of which tends to maintain a modicum of virtuous behavior. Hence, there is a moral order inherent in creation itself, an order that links and binds the divine, humans, and human society in what can only be described as a spiritually unified fashion.

In addition to these conceptions of society, celebrated economist Fredrick von Hayek posits an updated organic analogy in his work *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960). This conception introduces a bit of conflict in conservatives' understanding of the individual, society, and the state. Indeed, much of the tension that exists in contemporary American conservativism is that between "traditionalists" such as Kirk, whose emphasis is on tradition and authority, and libertarianism, of which, the emphasis in primarily on expanding the scope of individual freedom.[58] Hayek for his part distinguishes two strands of liberty emerging from Western liberal thought: the Anglo tradition and the Galician-French tradition.[59] The former, in Hayek's view, embodies all the aspects of an organic, spontaneously arising social order, while the latter is built upon the edifice of

---

[58] See Frank S. Meyer, ed., *What is Conservativism?*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964).

[59] F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 54ff; Hayek's conception will prove useful in understanding the neoconservative agenda to restore what they view as the traditional American character.

human rationality alone. "We have had to the present day," argues Hayek, "two different traditions in the theory of liberty: one empirical and unsystematic, the other speculative and rationalistic—the first based on an interpretation of traditions and institutions which had grown up and were but imperfectly understood, the second aiming at the construction of a utopia, which has been tried but never successfully."[60] According to Hayek, the two traditions merged in the "liberal movement of the nineteenth century," with the French tradition and its obsession with a rationally-constructed social order gaining the intellectual high ground. This had profound impact on the social order of continental Europe, the result, in democratic terms, is what Hayek refers to as the conflict between liberal democracy and social or totalitarian democracy.[61] As J.L. Talmon argues, "one stands for organic, slow, half-conscious growth, the other for doctrinaire deliberateness; one for trial and error procedure, the other for an enforced solely valid procedure."[62] It was the Anglo tradition, however, that in Hayek's view characterized liberal democracy's content along with the organic aspects of human society—and which would come to epitomize American political society—while the Galician tradition's insistence on human rationality is the direct cause of the great social upheavals of the twentieth century.

On the question concerning social order and the impact of the two traditions, Hayek states "there is hardly a greater contrast imaginable than that between their respective conceptions of the evolution and functioning of a social order and the part played by liberty."[63] The Galician tradition, with its direct roots in the Enlightenment

---

[60] Ibid., 54.

[61] Ibid., 55.

[62] J. L. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 71.

[63] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 56.

and modernity, placed its emphasis on human contrivance as the exclusively valid source of social order. The Anglo tradition, on the other hand, revealed that the basis of social order did not necessarily rely on either reason or revelation. As Hayek adds: "For the first time it was shown that an evident order which was not the product of a designing human intelligence need not therefore be ascribed to the design of a higher, supernatural intelligence, but that there was a third possibility—the emergence of order as the result of adapted evolution."[64] Both the specific permutations resulting from these adaptations and the concrete social order that thus "evolves" is of note, in that the specific truth this society comes to represent can itself be understood as having developed in an evolutionary manner. Modernity and its emphasis on human rationality stood to challenge any conception of order contrary to the dictates of reason. Hence, in the face of modern constructions, both traditional or revealed societies, and what Hayek would characterize as evolved society, are but two lesser options in the understanding of social order. In this way Hayek reveals his own bias in favor of the Anglo tradition. Nevertheless, Hayek's understanding of the evolutionary unfolding of society will prove useful in understanding how the traditional American civil religion developed and, juxtaposed with the recent contrivance, provides a clearer picture of the recent contrivance.

RELIGION, MORAL RELATIVISM AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

To put the above discussion into broader context it is necessary to explore the internal dynamics of modernity, particularly modernity's impact on traditional

[64] Ibid., 59.

mythological and sacred belief systems. Religion, we have seen, as with other traditional structures of authority, is an essential element in what Burke refers to as the "decent drapery of life."[65] Yet religion, as with these other traditional structures of authority, became the very object of the Enlightenment's social critique. The Enlightenment sought to replace what it regarded as the superstition of traditional or revealed religion with a rational form of ethics and morality; a contrived morality couched in organic terms—and based as it were, exclusively on the techniques and myths of the Age of Reason. Accordingly, Enlightenment thinkers sought to devise a system of morality that conformed, in their worldview, to the universal laws of the physical world. In this respect, the Enlightenment intended to shed light on a truth hitherto veiled and obfuscated by the vested interests of aristocratic and ecclesiastic authority. Newton's laws of physics represented the cornerstone of the new truth of society; that is, a material orientation in which modern inductive science promised a new life for calcified Western societies. Enlightenment theorists, then, had only to find how to implement this new truth in regards to human society. The various attempts to deal with this issue had the added effect of calling into question the understanding of the world in terms of a divine or transcendent order. As Edward O. Wilson argues:

> The more radical Enlightenment writers, alert to the implications of scientific materialism, moved to reassess God himself. They imagined a Creator obedient to his own natural laws—the belief known as deism.[66]

This "radicalism" embodied a conscious break with traditional forms of authority with the added intention of implementing a new truth for human society, a truth predicated, in

---

[65] Ibid., 133.

[66] Wilson, *Consilience*, 34.

turn, upon modern science. Deism became, in a very real sense, the religion of the Enlightenment.

But deism also contains a certain duplicity. Deism, on the one hand, all but rejected the Judeo-Christian understanding of God and man—that is, the notion of a personal relationship of the Creator with creation—but it also refused to sanction outright atheism, opting instead, for an impersonal Creator detached from creation.[67] The proof of God's existence was in the rational understanding of the laws of the universe, namely, God's laws. And even God was bound by the laws of creation—miracles, in this sense, could be seen as the violations of God's own laws. [68]

Miracles aside, in the mysteries of existence the deists stacked the deck in favor of reason. But this was not all. In order to complete their project of a new moral standard for society, the laws of the physical universe had to be represented in some meaningful fashion in human societies. For if God established physical laws governing the course of the physical universe, there was no reason why this idea should not apply to the human social universe as well: "There seemed no reason in principle why moral causes should not work in ways that which were more than analogous to Newton's Laws of Motion."[69] Hence, the period of the Enlightenment and the early modern period can be characterized

---

[67] Ibid.

[68] As one political historian writes: "There has always been a strand in Christian theology which emphasized that God was a rational God, and Newtonian physics showed rational men what God's rationality actually meant. God was a transcendent watchmaker who had created a mechanical universe whose laws were God's laws. … God must have meant rational men to find out how He had ordered His universe, and he can't have meant to deceive them. God breaking the physical rules of His own universe is what Christians call miracles," (J.M. McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought,* [London: Routledge, 1996], 304).

[69] McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*, 305.

as the scramble within Western societies to cope with the new truth and apply it to a concrete political society.

With the Judeo-Christian worldview marginalized and, by and large, discredited, a new moral framework based on universal laws—or self-evident truths—seemed the logical substitution. Nevertheless, for conservatives and later critics of modernity, the Enlightenment's cure for Western society's ill was the equivalent of "bad" medicine. The fundamental defect of the "enlightened" solution presaged the fundamental defect of later capitalist society (as we will see): rationality and rational self-interests ignore the magnitude of non-rational or mystical experiences of a sacramental quality on the human psyche. Wilson explains it this way:

> The fatal flaw in deism is thus not rational at all but emotional. Pure reason is unappealing because it is bloodless. Ceremonies stripped of sacred mystery lose their emotional force, because celebrants need to defer to a higher authority in order to consummate their instinct for tribal loyalty. In times of danger and tragedy especially, unreasoning ceremony is everything. Rationalism provides no substitute for surrender to an infallible and benevolent being, or for the leap of faith called transcendence.[70]

Under the *philosophes* and other enlightened minds, the "decent drapery of life," that is, the social conventions of venerable types of religious and aristocratic, honor-bound authority, was flung open to allow the light of reason to shine upon human endeavors. In place of these tradition forms of authority, exclusively rational forms of organization were to be established and substituted, and sanctioned, as it were, by those enlightened individuals, free from the influence or subversion of Scholastic thought. Little concern, however, was given to the adverse effects of such a program.

---

[70] Wilson, *Consilience*, 36.

The result of the Enlightenment's project inevitably resulted in the nihilism and moral relativism of Nietzsche and the critics of modernity.[71] Nietzsche, for instance, marks the consequences of the event in no uncertain terms:

> The greatest recent event—that "God is dead," that the belief in the Christian God has ceased to be believable—is even now beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. … The event itself is much too great, too distant, too far from the comprehension of the many even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having *arrived* yet, not to speak of the notion that many people might know what has really happened here, and what must collapse now that this belief has been undermined—all that was built upon it, leaned on it, grew into it; for example, our whole European morality.[72]

Modern science and philosophy, in their rush to promote the Age of Reason had, in a sense, killed God—even if its full consequences escaped the attention of the "many." Accordingly, in their project to fill what they perceived as an obsolete and redundant social order, Enlightenment theorists contrived a social order based on what they perceived to be the true order of the universe—i.e., a universe conceived in mechanical terms. Little care was given to the unintended consequences of their actions; that is, to the vital function of the "decent drapery of life." As a result, the very ground of public morality gave way to moral relativism and open the door to ideological constructions and the immanentist/totalitarian movements of the twentieth-century.[73]

---

[71] See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 141-240; Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*, (New York: Free Press, 1999), 154-157.

[72] Fredrick Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: Book V.*

[73] Moral relativism should not be construed to be simply an "anything goes" type of mentality in regard to ethical considerations. Rather, moral relativism is a view in which moral or ethical appraisals "are essentially dependent on the standard that defines a particular moral code, the practices and norms accepted by a social group at a specific place and time. Given that there is in fact a plurality of social groups, with different mores, the relativist argues that there exists no point of view from which these codes can themselves be appraised, no 'absolute' criteria by which they can be criticized" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995, Ted Honderich, ed., s.v., "Relativism, ethical").

Liberal political thought must also be considered in this context. As the descendant of the Enlightenment, modern liberal thought would intensify the trend toward moral relativism.[74] Liberalism, at its most fundamental level, is a political theory founded on the natural goodness of human beings and which takes as its goal the construction of a society of autonomous individuals. But perhaps even more important, liberal thought places considerable emphasis on the construction of a *neutral* social, political, economic and epistemological framework, a condition in which no particular "way of life" is favored over all others and no particular conception of the "good" or the good life is recognized--this neutrality being necessary for the goal of individual autonomy. As Michael Sandel explains, liberal thought advances the ideal of a "procedural" state, a state that upholds a basic framework of individual rights and does not seek the promotion of any objective notion of the "good":

> Its central idea is that government should be neutral toward the moral and religious views its citizens espouse. Since people disagree about the best way to live, government should not affirm in law any particular vision of the good life. Instead it should provide a framework of rights that respects persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own values and ends. Since this liberalism asserts the priority of fair procedures over particular ends, the public life it informs might be called the procedural republic.[75]

This liberal ideal, then, tends to diminish any shared or common conception of the truth, and dismisses a publicly shared theology as potentially obtrusive.

Knowledge, likewise, is bound to a neutral conceptual framework, with objective "facts" clearly distinguished—and preferred—to that of subjective "values." Epistemology is thus limited in its scope to the collection of factual data and its

---

[74] McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*, 298ff.

[75] Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4.

accumulation and theory construction by way of the empiricism espoused by Bacon, Hobbes, Locke and other early modern thinkers. The legacy of modern empiricism would ultimately culminate in the early twentieth-century philosophy of logical-positivism and its social scientific embodiment, behaviorism.[76] But even with the vast increase in the amount of knowledge available, the standard of neutrality confounds any attempt to attain certainty in regard to legitimate facts.

This problem of neutrality extends to moral debate, particularly in discussions concerning the grounding or ultimate source of moral authority. Despite charges that contemporary liberalism embodies a highly relativistic moral framework, early liberalism does tend to ground itself in some transcendent, unchanging measure, as with "inalienable rights" of the American political experience. This, in turn, amounts to a revival of classical natural law of sorts—but the exact source of this unchanging measure is left unexamined or obscured by modern epistemology and varies from theorist to theorist, as seen in the variation of the "law of nature" of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Classical political theory avoided this problem by clearly discerning an absolute measure and applying it within a theoretical framework to human society. Aristotle's natural polis and man's role within it, for instance, reveals the source of moral order, namely nature, by which individuals can attune themselves and in turn the promote the natural polis. Aquinas, likewise, posits the existences of God's revealed law, discernable by reason, with the state established to uphold and enforce God's revealed law—and with human

---

[76] Logical-positivism, also known as logical or linguistic empiricism, is best understood as the modern philosophy of knowledge that asserts the primacy of observation in assessing the truth of statements concerning facts and holding that metaphysical and subjective arguments not based on observable data are meaningless and therefore irrelevant in scientific and even philosophic inquiry (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995, Ted Honderich, ed., s.v., "Logical-positivism").

spiritual perfection, ostensibly, the end of human government. In this sense, Aquinas ascribes a natural quality to the state, a quality in harmony with God's plan for humanity. Liberal theory, on the other hand, was forced to justify and prop-up, often with very specious language, an eternal or transcendent measure within an intellectual environment in which such measures were suspect or, from Nietzsche's perspective, "dead." Locke, for instance, as exemplar of the early modern tradition, fails to expand his argument of natural law beyond his notion of natural reason; he simply states that there is a dictate of reason natural to man, which compels individuals into civil society in order to preserve their natural rights of life, liberty, and property.[77] In addition, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau ascribe a much greater capacity for human creativity and the human creative capacity than do their classical predecessors (i.e., in man's vast increase in wealth, technology, knowledge and so forth) without realizing that such expanded capacities conflict with the remnants of the classical conception of nature employed by their theories. Thus, in attempting to unleash this capacity for creativity, modern theorists fail to develop the moral constraints necessary to use this creative capacity wisely. Man's "nature," in the classical sense, no longer serves as the logical limit on human development and the only constraint on the human creative capacity is, perhaps, the destruction the species—whether through warfare, the desolation of the physical environment, scientific, or genetic and biological hubris.

[77] Reason, in this sense, is the reason available to all individuals as individuals. Natural reason provides the basis for social harmony in that natural reason dictates that all individuals have the same natural rights as all others, all rights have corresponding duties, and thus, inalienable, natural rights are universal. Natural reason also provides the basis for passing judgment on others—a meta-right for judging "irrational" actors (McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought,*234-235).

The standard of neutrality in the West and the drift toward relativism that appear to be its natural corollary were analyzed by conservative theorists in an ominous diagnosis of the health of the Western world, namely, the "crisis of modernity." "The crisis of modernity," argues political theorist Leo Strauss, "reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern western man no longer knows what he wants—that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong."[78] The primary culprit in the crisis is the loss of normative discourse, that is, the demise of classical political philosophy, a condition brought about by the inextricable linking of any knowledge worthy of the name knowledge, as merely "scientific" knowledge or knowledge in the manner of neutrality.[79] "The crisis of modernity," Strauss adds "is then primarily the crisis of modern political philosophy."[80] From this crisis comes the alarming conclusion that there are no neutral rules of behavior for Western societies, if such rules can only be found by rational discourse. If any ethical rules are to be found, it is contingent upon the most creative or perhaps most powerful individuals in a society to set forth such conventions. Such is the program of both Romanticism and postmodernism, which extends the analysis of ethics to the understanding of reality itself. Reality, to the extent that it can be understood, is simply a social construction. Or as Wilson explains:

> In the exaggerated version of this constructivism one can discern no "real" reality, no objective truths external to mental activity, only prevailing versions disseminated by ruling social groups. Nor can ethics be firmly grounded, given

---

[78] Leo Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 82.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

that each society creates its own codes for the benefit of equivalent oppressive forces.[81]

The fact that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants and can no longer come to any significant agreement as to what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, reveals a dilemma in modern Western societies—a dilemma, in that societies that have been able to tap into enormous reservoirs of accumulated knowledge, that have been able to achieve exponential increases in science and technology, that have engendered a market system capable of enormous wealth creation and the raising of living standards for its citizens, nevertheless, lack a moral framework to use such "progress" wisely. For classical philosophy, nature provided the definitive standard by which human limitations were revealed: "[Classical] man has a definite place within the whole, a very exalted place; one can say that man is the measure of things or that man is the microcosm, but he occupies that place by nature; man has a place in an order which he did not originate … man's power is limited; man cannot overcome the limitations of his history."[82] Modern man, on the hand, has overcome nature in many respects, the outcome of which is that nature no longer provides a limitation on human creativity. Hence, modernity initiated a new understanding of man as an active, creative being. Speaking on the revolution in modern science Strauss argues: "The new natural

[81] Wilson, *Consilience*, 44.

[82] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 85; cf., p. 86, in which Strauss distinguishes Athens and Jerusalem (i.e., Reason and Revelation) from the modern project initiated by Machiavelli: "According to the Bible man is created in the image of God; he is given the rule over terrestrial creatures: he is not given rule over the whole; he has been put into a garden to work it and guard it; he has been assigned a place; righteousness is obedience to the divinely established order, just as justice is compliance with the natural order; to the recognition of elusive chance [i.e., nature] corresponds the recognition of inscrutable providence. … Machiavelli rejects the whole philosophic and theological tradition. … The traditional views either lead to the consequence that the political things are not taken seriously (Epicureanism) or else that they are understood in the light of an imaginary perfection—of imagined commonwealths and principalities, the most famous of them being the kingdom of God. [For Machiavelli] one must start from how men do live; one must lower the sights."

science differs from the various forms of the older one not only because of its new understanding of nature but also because of its new understanding of science; … knowing is a kind of making; human understanding prescribes nature its laws; man's power is infinitely greater than was hitherto believed; not only can man transform corrupt human matter, or conquer chance—all truth and meaning originate in man; they are not inherent in a cosmic order which exists independently of man's activity."[83]

With these changes in mind, the dilemma facing modern societies can thus be explained in the following way:

> As modern liberal societies develop, and humans discover the extent of their creative capacities, the remnants of natural law used to establish moral limits on those creative capacities will become both less believable and less applicable, eventually resulting in a situation where we have tremendous creative capacities but no clear idea of how we should use those capacities, that is, a situation of nihilism.[84]

In this manner, the problem can be understood in terms of the condition in which the neutral framework of liberal society ultimately unleashed the full capacities of human ingenuity, but in its course, also unleashed the technological equivalent of Pandora's Box, witnessed in modern or total warfare, industrial wastelands, economic crises of significant magnitude, and so forth.

Significantly, as liberalism opened the door to moral relativism in regard to specific, contemporary social indicators, conservative thinkers reacted in a somewhat limited fashion—though again, the long-term, unintentional effects of their reaction, as we will see, is rather significant in itself. The decline of the "nuclear" family, illegal

---

[83] Ibid., 88.

[84] Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity can Save Modernity from Itself*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 45.

drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, secularization of American society, and more recently, gay marriage, to name a few, were seen as hallmarks of moral relativism and cultural decline. Accordingly, modern liberal theory and the "crisis of modernity" it engendered drew the attention of social reformers in the United States. In response to this crisis, American conservative thinkers targeted what they saw as the nihilistic tendencies brought about by the modern era. The United States, in their view, had to be rescued from a downward spiral into moral relativism. America was, in the words of Judge Robert Bork, "slouching toward Gomorrah," weighed down, as it were, by modern liberalism and shorn of its traditional religious beliefs.[85]

Neoconservatives, in particular, influenced by their intellectual sage Leo Strauss, have been interested in utilizing the Platonic concept of "noble" lies, myths, or falsehoods, in order to restore social order in American political society. For the neoconservatives, a "traditional" American Protestantism largely filled this role. Indeed, in their view, it is the traditional American character, and its Anglo-Protestant brethren in England, Australia, and so forth, that allowed the English-speaking world largely to withstand the onslaught of modernity. Nevertheless, those of the neoconservative persuasion see Protestant Christianity in terms of its of utility of restoring and maintaining social order. Irving Kristol, for instance, presents the role religion plays in the lives of the masses in relation to that of a philosophic elite:

> If God does not exist, and if religion is an illusion that the majority of men cannot live without...let men believe in the lies of religion since they cannot do without them, and let then a handful of sages, who know the truth and can live with it, keep it among themselves. Men are then divided into the wise and the foolish, the

[85] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*: *Modern Liberalism and American Decline*, (New York: Regan Books, 2003), 24ff.

> philosophers and the common men, and atheism becomes a guarded, esoteric doctrine—for if the illusions of religion were to be discredited, there is no telling with what madness men would be seized, with what uncontrollable anguish.[86]

In *The Right Nation* (2005), John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge explain this aspect of the neoconservative agenda in this way:

> [Neoconservatives] were for the most part agnostics when it came to religious faith—but agnostics who nevertheless believed that religion helped to promote social cohesion and social virtue. Their writings are littered with references to "noble myths." Religion might not be true, they seemed to be saying, but it can serve a useful social purpose in keeping society in order. …This willingness to accept "noble myths," as long as they helped the cause, helped to forge the neocons' reputation as Machiavellian string-pullers.[87]

Machiavellian string-pulling for the moment aside, the attempt to restore American hegemony in such areas as global-strategic power and dominance, moral and civic virtue can rather be understood as the attempt to establish—or restore—a civil theology for the masses of American political society based on their presumption of the true American character. Neoconservatives, in proper Platonic fashion, left the Cave and were all too ready to return as America's "Guardians," seeking to arrest, in their own way, the American decline into "barbarization."

Specifically, I will argue, neoconservative intellectuals, in their agenda to thwart American decline, in essence, crafted a neo-Platonic civil theology ostensibly promoted as a restoration of the older, traditional American civil religion. In effect, however, the project they engendered was none other than the establishment of an orthodoxy of a

---

[86] Irving Kristol, "God and the Psychoanalysts," in *Neo-Conservativism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, 389-390.

[87] John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*, (New York: Penguin, 2005), 75.

sectarian Protestant community, the unintended consequences of which, being the creation of a form of political messianism anathema to modern conservative thought. Furthermore, it can be argued that the neoconservative project to re-moralize America by way of a revitalized civil theology is, in the larger scheme of things, none other than the attempt to shape the world in America's image—that is, to make the world America writ large, or to take America as the "measure of all things."

This new civil theology and the society it allegedly represents stands in contrast to the republican regime that characterized the United States in its early history and its distinct and unique civil theology, one that fused state and society, public and private, citizen and community, into an organic whole reminiscent of Aristotle's natural polis. The new civil theology discarded the tempering aspects of this civil theology in favor of a more active, jingoist, and hyper-prescriptive re-moralization of American society. Together with the broader conservative movement in the United States, particularly the Religious Right, the combined effort of this philosophic enterprise resulted in a theological construction similar to that of Hobbes's political theory *Leviathan*. That in order to maintain "peace and concord" in American political society, Judeo-Christianity was adapted as the civil theology for American society. Nevertheless, the leaders this movement lacked the shrewdness of Hobbes. Whereas Hobbes took great care in his theoretical construct, limiting Christianity's revolutionary elements, the recent American case is significantly influenced by Protestantism's radical millennialist tendencies. These tendencies indicate that while heaven might not be created here on earth by human agency alone, in the meantime, at least God's faithful can actively prepare the way for the Kingdom of God—or a least hold off the forces of evil unto the time of God's choosing.

And whereas Hobbes embarked to create a new understanding of man as man (an individual seeking only immediate material gratification), the current project makes no overt attempt to create or restore a "new" spiritual view of man; thus the limited, Hobbesian view of man remains essentially the intact, yet with mankind maintaining a considerably more potent technological-base and ever-more extravagant means to secure material gratification. The result, an immanentist civil theology emerged from a relatively benign one—one that had put limits on radicalism in the United States—and along with the new civil theology, a reinvigorated materialistic view of man that amplified the existing materialistic driven society conjoined with a powerful state with the potential to transform both human society and human nature.

The convergence of the religious with the political within the sphere of civil theology vastly complicates any study of human thought and action. Conflict over the jurisdictional boundaries of sectarian church and secular state is a highly problematical affair. It follows that the study of civil theology is on its strongest ground when attempting to analyze, rather than to offer substitutions of thought. As J.L. Talmon writes: "The postulate of some ultimate, logical, exclusively valid social order is a matter of faith, and it is not much use in trying to defeat it by argument. But its significance to the believer, and the power it has to move men and mountains, can hardly be exaggerated."[88] As such, the aim here is not to propose a counter-argument to offset the ill-effects of civil theology; rather, the aim is to understand these effects and the impact such effects may have on a free society and their reflection in public policy.

---

[88] J. L. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 13.

PLAN OF STUDY

This study is not concerned so much with social-tectonics (that is, the behavior of surface forces, such as social movements, revolutions, warfare, and so on) as it is with the deeper forces at work, shaping and molding how humans think and how they project ideas onto their institutions, and more generally, the health of a society—what can be referred to as sociopathology. It acknowledges the power of ideas and the historical unfolding (expansion or contraction) of human consciousness on the creation, development and decline of human institutions, while acknowledging other factors such as materialism and their impact on those very ideas or consciousness.

Each chapter seeks to fill in the development and institutionalization of civil religion that may be lacking in previous works on the subject. Following the Introduction, Chapter One examines Voegelin's method for a "new science" of politics. Emphasis is given to the impact of positivism on the social sciences and how the study of human social order and any truth embodied by that social order is limited by a "fact-value" dichotomy. Since civil religion embodies a particular truth concerning the existence of political society, such a fact-value dichotomy will ultimately affect the understanding of civil religion in the United States, particularly in how it is socialized and internalized in succeeding generations of Americans. And with the emergence of modern liberal state over America's classical republican roots, this lack of normative discourse would ultimately pave the way toward the more radical reconstruction of the American civil religion. Chapter Two, "Civil Religion in Perspective" explores different conceptions of civil religion, how civil religion affects the understanding of a given society. Western civilization, it will be argued, emerged from the Middle Ages without a

viable civil theology for the masses of the emerging nation states. Moreover, much that can be considered political theorizing in the Western world, is in fact, the search for viable civil theologies for a reformed, enlightened, or post-Christian world. Chapter Three, "American Civil Religion in Perspective" examines the unique nature of the American civil religion and how it differs from those of other civil theological constructions. The chapter also examines an understanding of the American political experience, particular in terms of Arthur Schlesinger's notion of America as "experiment" or "destiny"—that is, whether the United States can be understood in terms of a republic founded with the intention of avoiding the mistakes of past republics, or whether it is imbued with a national destiny, sanctioned by divine providence. Chapter Four, "Conservativism and the Constitution of Social Order" examines the evolution of conservative thought and the impact of modernity on social order. It will be argued that contemporary conservative movements in the United States can be best understood as attempting to restore a venerable American tradition, chief of which is an older understanding of the American civil religion. Into this mix is posited the conservative programme for social change—a seemingly contradiction in terms. Chapter Five examines the nature and function of the American civil religion in relation to these factors and the change in the American political regime from its early republican period to the development of the liberal state. The American civil religion will be seen to have changed as a result of the growth of the liberal state, particularly in the establishment of an American sectarian Protestantism. Chapter Six examines the immanentist implications of the surrogate civil religion and the factors aggravating this trend. The primary factors include the inclusion of radical Protestantism within the conservative

political agenda in the name of political expedience, the influence of positive science on normative discourse in the United States, and the multilateral challenge to America's global hegemony.

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW SCIENCE FOR POLITICS?

Of considerable importance to this study is a knowledge and an understanding of the approach or methodology to be employed to comprehend the concept of civil religion. Such an understanding is essential because the method to be utilized to understand this subject—and indeed, any subject—can, in a sense, be considered as important as the subject itself; in that, the method facilitates our conception of the problem at hand. Moreover, for our purpose, the enunciation of a sound method facilitates a greater understanding of a political problem not amendable to direct quantification. In light of this enunciation, it is perhaps imperative to dispel the notion that this study is simply a defense of method, or the notion that the method has displaced the subject as the primary focus of analysis. Rather, in keeping with the subject matter and the reexamination of civil religion as a salient concept for understanding political behavior, it is important to delineate how this phenomenon can be investigated.

The crux of the methodology to be employed is more or less based on Eric Voegelin's notion of a "new science of politics."[1] Voegelin, for his part, recognized a grave problem inherent in twentieth-century political practice; namely, the condition in which a true science of political order had been abandoned by political science, with

---

[1] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*; Cf. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 203-223 and Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 16ff.

"philosophies of history" (understood in the broader sense as "ideologies") largely filling the vacuum. For many theorists, a philosophy of history is a particularly disconcerting development in the evolution of Western philosophical thought in that such constructions open the door to an intractable form of moral relativism, or that of ethical systems based upon the prevailing winds of the general will or those of high aesthetic quality as opposed to transcendent measures such as natural law or revealed religion.[2] Such constructions fall under the heading of historicism and are associated with such expressions as *zeitgeist* or "the spirit of the age." But the construction of a philosophy of history can also be understood as an attempt to realize and shape the unfolding of events of human affairs in terms of the "course of history" toward an identifiable goal. Hegel and Marx are two theorists most readily associated with philosophies of history (with the respective unfolding of a realm of freedom, with Hegel, and a classless society, with Marx, in which all contradictions have been eliminated from society), but any ideological construction with an eye on some deterministic or final institutional and social arrangement runs the possibility of crossing into the realm of a philosophy of history. The projects engendered by such philosophies of history (and the construction is best understood in the plural) are, Voegelin argues, a corruption of Aristotelian teleology and, perhaps more importantly, Christian eschatology.[3] A classical, teleological understanding of nature, for instance, holds that the universe, objects in the material world, and even human societies and the individuals who comprise these societies, are best understood as moving toward a natural

---

[2] See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 9-34 and "What is Political Philosophy?", in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy,* for a full treatment of these themes.

[3] The concrete manifestations of these projects, initially begun by theorists as early as the eighteenth century, exacted a terrible toll on humanity, particularly in the ideological maelstrom of the first-half of the twentieth century. In addition, the Cold War revealed a protracted ideological struggle between East and West, of which these concrete manifestations proved to be extremely violent in themselves.

end or purpose. This movement may be interrupted or corrupted by various factors. But all natural phenomena have the potential, at the least, to reach their ideal natural state if the proper conditions are given—hence a dichotomy between the actual and the potential. For Aristotle, the explanation or justification of a given phenomenon or object is to be found not only in its readily observed purpose or cause, but rather, in its "final end" or purpose—that is, the reason for an phenomenon's or object's very existence or being, ostensibly its more perfect nature. In Christian theology (St. Thomas Aquinas for instance), a similar understanding arises: teleology is utilized as a basic premise for the existence of God, in that the order and efficiency of the natural world can be explained as the unfolding of God's purpose for Creation. Christian eschatology, is in itself, an understanding of mundane history, in which human history is moving toward a final state of perfection, in which the Kingdom of God is made manifest here on earth—albeit by the Hand of the Almighty and not dependent on human agency. Ideologies corrupt this understanding of human history and give concrete societies a purpose by which they are able to overcome the natural world and perfect both society and the society's members by way of human agency alone.

Any philosophy of history is, in and of itself, a distortion of reality that leads to the construction of ideologies in the truest sense of the term. In this sense, ideologies maintain a certain "us versus them" dichotomy, in which one side defends its particular "representations" against those of an opposing group.[4] One can say then, that the ideas expressed by members of a political society are none other than a particular set of ideas that can be regarded, in the words of Karl Mannheim, as "functions of existence." As

[4] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, (New York: Harvest Books), 56.

Mannheim indicates, "this means that opinions, statements, propositions and systems of ideas are not taken at their face value but are interpreted in the light of the life-situation of the one who expresses them."[5]

In the Voegelinian context, ideologies are constructed on relative and false pretexts and, accordingly, represent a "huge falsification of reality."[6] Nevertheless, these ideological systems do provide the theorist with a means for understanding particular social contexts, such as the ethos of a particular society, age and so forth, and for the theorist to adjust the analysis accordingly. According to Voegelin: "Once the deformation of existence, which leads to the construction of ideological systems, is recognized as such, the categories of undeformed existence can be identified and must be judged." [7] Hence, ideologies provide empirical data for the theorist and prove to be particularly useful in penetrating to some of the fundamental aspects of human behavior. With these qualifications given, it is possible to differentiate a method that is best able to capture particular experiences of human social realty and to translate the knowledge and understanding gained from such analysis into a theory of politics—as opposed to a merely deterministic view of history. In Voegelin's analysis, then, the "substance of history," in as much as there is such a thing, "consists in the experiences in which man gains the understanding of his humanity and together with it the understanding of its limits."[8] Accordingly, human limitations or a sense of finitude (or the lack thereof),

---

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 91.

[7] Ibid. 91, (From Voegelin's *Autobiographical Memoirs*).

[8] Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*, 78.

figure predominantly in Voegelin's critique of modernity and the ideological systems engendered by modernity.

Within this framework of a new science for politics, Voegelin establishes his argument that analysis of human political behavior must center on the notion of representation. Voegelin distinguishes three key aspects to this "new" science that must be considered if analysis is to penetrate to a level in which a general theory of politics can be developed: (1) inquiry must extend beyond a mere description of representative institutions into the nature of representation itself, especially on how a political society articulates itself within existence and "gains existence for action in history"; (2) analysis must continue to the exploration of the symbols that a society generates which are indicative on how a society interprets itself as a representative of higher or transcendent truth; and (3) an acknowledgment that the classification of these symbols does not constitute a "flat catalogue" of empirical data, but rather, proves amendable toward the theorization of an "intelligible succession of phases in a historical process."[9] And so, a political society, over the course of its origins and development reveals a record of representation, the historicity of which is made manifest in concrete symbols generated by society. In other words, this type of representation developed by Voegelin is not limited to representation of a "constituency" in the contemporary sense of the term, or what Voegelin labels "elemental" representation, but is also representation in a much broader, fundamental sense. Representation, then, can also be understood as to how a society interprets itself within the mysteries of existence itself, or "existential"

[9] Ibid., 109ff

representation, with analysis proceeding, ultimately, to the level in which society actually represents a "truth" of existence or a "transcendental" form of representation.[10]

This type of analysis advanced by Voegelin can be extended to American political society and its unique set of symbols concerning representation. In the United States, for instance, one can map out the static and dynamic symbols used to express not only how members of society seek to represent themselves politically (or the elemental type of representation), or quasi-politically, as in the distortion of the liberal-pluralist system that now characterizes American politics (i.e., existential representation),[11] but also how the symbols that emerge from such representation contain an ingredient of transcendent truth, such as notions concerning America's unique "destiny." (American exceptionalism, as we will see, is at the heart of American identity.) And in the Voegelinian sense, this development, extending from the creation of the United States up till contemporary times, must be understood as a historical process—though not, as we will see, as part of a purposive historical unfolding as in some "project" or philosophy of history. Some of these symbols generated by American society have remained relatively unchanged. The general notion of individual liberty, for example, has remained a static conception over multiple generations. Others have been more dynamic—e.g. the notion of liberty shifting from a negative conception, or a "freedom from" government coercion, to a notion of positive freedom, or the conception of a proactive government seeking to extend the benefits of freedom to all members of American society.

---

[10] Ibid. 149-174.

[11] For example, Ted Lowi's critique of contemporary interest-group liberalism, in *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority,* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969).

What is revealed when examining the historical unfolding of symbolic generation in this fashion is a theoretical orientation on the part of the theorist qua theorist, the focus of which, is on understanding the ontological possibilities of a political society and questions concerning the right order of both the individual souls that make up society and the right order of society itself. This type of analysis is essentially Platonic and Aristotelian in its approach in that it embodies the attempt by philosophers of the classical Western tradition to make sense of their place within reality, and more specifically, the attempt to discern what constitutes the best political order for human society. As Plato declares quite adroitly, "for no light matter is at stake, nothing less than the rule of human life."[12] Voegelin's new science, then, is not entirely new by any means, but represents a restoration of a science concerned with a "consciousness of principles"; namely, an orientation of political science toward the understanding of the underlying themes of human political society and the development of principles to guide existing societies, including a society's own limitations.

It is important to point out that the restoration which Voegelin so passionately advocates is not to be construed as a literary renaissance (or a rediscovery of classic texts of political theory) or a literal revival of classical politics; the undertaking of such a "revival," conjoined with the application of the assumptions (*writ*, theories) from an earlier period in human civilization to contemporary social problems is an endeavor doomed to failure. As Voegelin quickly reveals, one cannot restore political science today through a simple restoration of the theories of theorist of the past:

---

[12] Plato, *Republic*, 352d.

> Much can be learned, to be sure, from the earlier philosophers concerning the range of problems, as well as concerning their theoretical treatment; but the very historicity of human existence, that is, the unfolding of the typical in meaningful concreteness, precludes a valid reformulation of principles through return to former concreteness.[13]

Hence, a step towards a new science must begin with the acceptance that not all is well within the discipline as it currently stands *and* that one must carry on with the search for remedies and solutions peculiar to the specific time and place.

RITE, MYTH, AND THEORY

Voegelin's analysis indicates that a true science of politics must not be centered simply on external phenomenona, but rather, must penetrate to some of the more fundamental aspects of human political behavior. "Human society," he argues, "is not merely a fact, or an event, in the external world to be studied by an observer like natural phenomena."[14] Rather, analysis must grasp an understanding of the internal aspects of political societies, namely, to what is referred to as self-interpretation, or rather, the "self-illumination of society."[15] Although external dimensions are significant in the understanding of a society's internal dimensions—and indeed, much, if not most, of contemporary political science focuses on the external, or elemental dimensions—each political society must be recognized as a whole little world, which, according to Voegelin, is "illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who

---

[13] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 89; cf., Leo Strauss, *City and Man*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 11.

[14] Voegelin, *New Science of Politics,*109.

[15] Ibid.

continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization."[16] Voegelin's neologism for these whole little worlds is a "cosmion." Moreover, this self-illumination must be understood in terms of the symbols a society creates, which in turn, are amenable to changes either of a progressive or retrogressive quality, or in terms of what Voegelin describes as degrees of differentiation:

> [Society] is illuminated through an elaborate symbolism, in various degrees of compactness and differentiation—from rite, to myth, to theory—and this symbolism illuminates it with meaning in so far as the symbols make the internal structure of such a cosmion, the relations between its members and groups of members, as well as its existence as a whole, transparent for the mystery for human existence.[17]

Thus, if one recalls that Voegelin's new science is very much a philosophy of history, one can map, for instance, Western Civilization's progressive development from the primitive rites that sought to explain man's place within a greater cosmic (albeit chaotic) reality, to the development of elaborate myths on the origins of immortal gods and mortal humans, and finally to the formulation of theory concerning the anthropological truth of man and society as embodied in Greek philosophy and early Christian theology. The slippage from "theory" of this sort back to myth or rite represents theoretical retrogression, and thereby, a contraction in the philosophic understanding gained concerning reality itself—a problem with can associate with ideological constructions. Theory, then, represents the "maximum of differentiation" of human experience, a unique stage in the self-illumination of society in which human beings have come to a critical understanding of their place within greater reality.

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

Additionally, Voegelin makes a clear distinction between nominal theories of man and what can be considered a true theory of man. "Theory," for instance, "is not just any opining about human existence in society."[18] And it is certainly not subject to the mere assertion of preference. Rather, it is the "attempt at formulating the meaning of existence by explicating the content of a definite class of experiences."[19] Moreover, these "experiences" are in due course the means to establish empirical control and, in the parlance of contemporary social science, to demonstrate internal validity concerning, not simply knowledge itself, but also the method or tools utilized to achieve that knowledge. As Voegelin adds, "Its [i.e., theory's] argument is not arbitrary but derives its validity from the aggregate of experiences to which it must permanently refer for empirical control."[20] The key distinction, then, is between *philosophos* and *philosodoxos*; or, the love of wisdom versus the love of opinion (the philosopher versus the sophist). And it is only by way of theory that wisdom is secured in the truest sense—all else is opining or the establishment of an orthodoxy of opinion, most likely in the name of some form of expediency. The trail from rite to myth to theory, then, involves a class of very definite experiences and is not merely arbitrary classification, propositions, or hypothesis building.

What then is the starting point for the construction of a viable theory of man? Voegelin's analysis concentrates on Plato's exploration of the human soul and the

[18] Ibid. 138.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

resulting social order predicated on the "right order of the soul."[21] And indeed, it is Plato's notion of the *polis as man written large* that serves as the creed for the classical epoch, or to what can be referred to as the "anthropological principle."[22] This principle stands in opposition to the rites and myths that many ancient, pre-philosophic societies were constructed upon. The cosmological myth, for instance, interpreted human reality in terms of humanity's place within a greater cosmological order. Such a myth structure can be understood in the following way:

> The cosmological myth is the form within which early humanity, both nonliterate and literate, organized its sense of reality. By narrating stories of how the ordered whole (the *universe*, we might say) came into being and gained its present shape, early people oriented themselves in the world. … Prior to modernity, and with significant qualifications for revelational and philosophical peoples, fitting into the cosmic whole, being in tune with the cosmic force, was the matter to which most people turned their attention. The basic goal of cosmological peoples, in other words, was being true to, living out, their deep conviction that the world was a living whole.[23]

Plato's extraordinary accomplishment would from thenceforth challenge the basis on which the little world, that is the cosmion, interprets itself. In political societies in which the anthropological principle penetrated deeply enough, social order would no longer be predicated upon a mere attunement to cosmological order—as in the cosmological empires of the East. Rather, a theory of man, a symbolic differentiation unique to Greek philosophical tradition, eked out a position as a rival to the existing cosmological truths in the Greek poleis. Or as Voegelin states, "A political society in existence will have to

---

[21] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 136ff; Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 126ff; Plato, *Republic*, 368-369, 428ff, 501ff.

[22] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 136.

[23] John Carmody, and Denise Lardner Carmody, *Interpreting the Religious Experience*, (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1987), 16, 22.

be an ordered cosmion, but not at the price of man; it should not only be a microcosmos but also a macroanthropos."[24]

It is important to keep in mind that the truth of a given society in which the philosopher works with, may be, and on most occasions, certainly is, in direct opposition to the theoretical truth of the philosopher. Socrates stands as a timeless example of this conflict. Nevertheless, the die was cast and Plato's discovery (and those initiated by his pre-Socratic predecessors) would forever change the cognitive landscape and how political societies would come to order themselves—at least in the West. It represents the "dynamic core of the new theory." Moreover, Aristotle and Christianity would further drive a wedge "into the idea that society represents nothing but cosmological truth."

TRUTH, ORDER, AND REPRESENTATION

Theory in the classical philosophic tradition represents an ordering experience quite distinct from primitive rites and the elaboration of myth. As such, the philosophic tradition broke significantly from the ancient cosmological representation and found a new ordering principle for society. And as we have seen, it was Plato's discovery of the truth of the soul that would form the foundation for social order, a philosophic truth indelibly in conflict with the existing truth of society—the latter being a truth which, in Plato's day, was built largely upon myth. (Hence, myth, prior to the new ordering principle, embodied the existential representation of society.) But what is it about the truth of the soul that makes it amenable to ordering society and superior to that of other ordering principles?

---

[24] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 136.

The "right order of the soul", that is, the healthy psyche, must, according to Plato, be distinguished from disorder in the soul. Thus of all the possible types of configurations possible for the human soul, there is ultimately one true type, all others represent some degree of pathological dysfunction. In other words, a healthy soul is one capable of actualizing its full potential and the full potential of the individual in which it resides, and by extension, souls in a full state of health comprise a healthy, or true type of society. Quite naturally for Plato, the exemplar of the true type of order of the soul is the philosopher, "while the sophist becomes the prototype of disorder."[25] There exists, then, a discrepancy between the ideal and the actual, between society representing philosophical truth and the existing truth of society, which in the Athens of Plato's era was the "sophist written large."[26]

With this knowledge in mind, Plato distinguishes his *civil theology* from both *mythological theology* and *philosophical theology* in that the type of soul engendered by the latter theologies is either *pseudos,* or false, as in the case of mythological theology, or is beyond the experiential capabilities of much of the population, as with philosophical theology. Lies or falsehoods involving the mundane matters of daily living can be tolerated (i.e. a "lie in words"). But falsehoods involving the truth of the soul are anathema and signify "true lies." In Plato's words, "deception, or being deceived or uniformed about the highest realities in the highest parts of themselves, which is the soul, … is what mankind [and the gods] least like."[27] Such falsehoods are indicative a disordered soul. And for those educated under the mythology of the poets, such disorder

[25] Ibid. 138.

[26] Ibid. 137.

[27] Plato, *Republic*, 382.

is the logical outcome of the ignorance of the true order of the soul, perpetuated by the existing educational system. Only by way of a complete turning around to the truth (the *periagoge*) is any semblance of order in the theoretical sense possible.[28] This is the message of the Parable of the Cave,[29] of the gaining of true knowledge by turning from darkness or the world of shadows (of the world of becoming), to the true light of being—of overcoming the true lies:

> Certain professors of education must be wrong when they say they can put a knowledge into the soul that was not there before, like sight into blind eyes … Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, the good.[30]

Hence, education must commence with the understanding that the old ways of myth have run their course and that advancements concerning the nature of the soul (in its power and capacity to learn) have brought forth new levels of experiencing reality—the truth as explicated by philosophy. Moreover, the old myths represent not simply distortions in the perception of reality, but disorder in the soul, which inevitably impedes the constitution of a healthy social order. As such, the new truth must be accepted by degrees lest the new truth overwhelm the sensibilities of the polis.

Voegelin's analysis of the truth of society and its source of order further reveals within Plato's thought dimensions of the soul; specifically, dimensions of both height and depth. These dimensions can me mapped out by what is referred to as the mystical

---

[28] Ibid., 518, 521, 525.

[29] Ibid. 514-ff.

[30] Ibid. 518.

ascent to the border of transcendence, and an anamnetic *descent* into the unconsciousness.[31] By both scaling and plumbing the heights and depths of the soul, the philosopher is at last able to bring to full justification the new source of truth, and by extension, the new standard for social order—what can be advanced as a "universal idea of man" predicated upon the healthy, natural condition of the human soul. Specifically, this venture brings man into a new consciousness of the transcendent divine (by way of the ascent to the border of transcendence), but also by the descent into the depths of the soul, knowledge of the extent to which the soul exists in relation to the divine—whose transcendent perfection represents a truth to be pursued, if never completely and absolutely attained. Hence, it is by way of a new understanding of God and man's relationship to God, that a true order of existence becomes possible.

Plato, in opposition to the Protagorean principle that "man is the measure of all things" thus offers his counter-principle: God is the measure of all things. "Now God ought to be to us the measure of all things, not man, as men commonly say (Protagoras)."[32] This proposition, however, is by no means limited to Plato and is merely carried forward in the *Republic* and the *Laws* as a testament to the philosophical advances his predecessors. Solon, for example, testifies as to the "unseen measure" for the ordering of society.[33] Heraclitus, likewise, states that the "unapparent connection is better than apparent."[34] It is Xenophanes, however, who, according to Voegelin, offers the "clearest insight into the constitution of a universal idea of man through the

---

[31] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics,* 140; cf., Strauss "Three Waves of Modernity," 85.

[32] Plato, *Laws*. 716c.

[33] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics,* 142.

[34] Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), Heraclitus, B 54; Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 142.

experience of transcendence."[35] For according to Xenophanes, God stands apart from his creation and is a witness and a measure for all subordinates: "There is one god, greatest among gods and men, similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought."[36] Moreover, Xenophanes critiques the anthropomorphism of the myths: "But mortals think that the gods are born, and have clothes and speech and shape like their own … But if cows and horses or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and make the things men can make, then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, cows like cows, and they would make their bodies similar in shape to those which each had themselves."[37] Thus the mystical philosophers added to the symbolism of human experience, a highly differentiated experience beyond the compact experiences of rite and myth, and thereby, an understanding of transcendence as the ultimate ordering principle and man's attunement or harmony to such a principle (as opposed to a cosmic order) as essential for both the healthy individual and society as a whole.

To the "anthropological principle" is thus added as its natural corollary, the "theological principle."[38] The polis as man written large is supplemented by God (in transcendent perfection) as the measure of man. In this sense, Plato and Aristotle mark the end of a long history of theoretical development. A theory of man and/in society is articulated and available for speculation as to potential versus actual. Philosophy provided the theoretical model, while the poleis provided the empirical datum. Moreover, the ramifications of such a theory are profound, ultimately affecting the works

---

[35] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 142-143.

[36] Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Xenophanes, B 23.

[37] Ibid. Xenophanes, B 14-15.

[38] Voegelin. 142.

of the Christian theologians (e.g., St Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas) and the foundations of Western Civilization.

It is important to keep in mind, that Plato's investigations were not a singular purposive venture with the intention of discovering a philosophy of man—or worse yet, utopianism in the modern sense. Rather, Plato's theory of the right order of the soul marked the unfolding of an academic project in the truest sense, in that it was the convergence of many minds, over several generations of Greek thinkers and statesmen, in a consilient moment.[39] As Voegelin writes, "The Platonic-Aristotelian elaboration of a new truth marked the end of a long history; it was the work of Athenian thinkers who hardly could have accomplished their theoretical generalizations without the preceding concrete practice of Athenian politics."[40] Moreover, Plato's work came at a critical point in time, a crisis point that required the turning of the *cìvis* toward a new truth in order to maintain the vitality of the polis. As Jowett notes:

> The dialogues of Plato show us the ancient religious system of Hellas in a state of disintegration and transition. Old ideas were passing away: Homer had ceased to be a sufficient guide to men who had sat at the feet of the Sophists: the traditional conceptions of right and wrong were made topics of debate in the schools. Amid this chaos of opinion Plato strove to separate the truer and more permanent elements of religion and to give a new sanction to them. The ancient mythology was intolerable to him; the stories of the god were lies, and, what is more, bad lies.[41]

Bad lies, it is to be remembered, are true lies. And true lies are an affront to theoretical truth. Hence the philosopher and his new truth found himself in opposition to the truth of

---

[39] The term academic is derived from the Academe, or the public grove where Plato taught his pupils, a place where minds were brought together and where theoretical truth was disseminated throughout the Hellas.

[40] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 144.

[41] B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 5, 3rd. edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1891), 422.

society. On this opposition rested, no less, notions of representation itself, and along with it, the question of civil religion. Here Plato's *theologia civilis* comes into clearer view. As the old mythological theology broke down, though never to an absolute degree, Plato recognized that a new theology was needed to sate the need of masses, masses that were unprepared for the dire truth of philosophy. Accordingly, Plato's contrived a civil theology that embodied a new truth and new sanction, the purpose of which was to ensure a well-ordered soul and it natural corollary, the well-ordered polis.

CIVIL RELIGION AND SOCIETY

From this analysis it is contended that societies are best understood, as in Voegelin's analysis, as whole little worlds, each representing some form of truth and, revealed, as it were, in the various symbols generated by society. Representation thus conceived must also be understood in a manner that transcends the elemental or existential variety—though it should be pointed out that the existential representative of a society tells us a great deal more about that society than its so-called elemental representative(s), which may indeed be considered as nominal representation, or representation in name only. What is more, the emergence of philosophy, particularly the theoretical truth expounded by Platonic-Aristotelian theory, emerged as an existential challenge to cosmological truth. Philosophy, properly understood, embodied a spiritual revolution and a universal claim upon man—much as Christianity would later become—and penetrated the mysteries of rite and myth, challenging their validity as ordering principles.[42] As a revolutionary force, the possibility ran that philosophical truth might

[42] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 161.

not, and better yet, could not be accepted as the commonly held truth—or the existential truth of society—by all members of society, at least to any significant degree, thus creating tension within society between competing claims of truth.

A serious problem can thus be discerned from this analysis. What happens, for instance, when the living truth of a society, that is, the existential representation of a society, ceases to fulfill its role as the civil theology of a polity? The myths that Plato so consciously seeks to expose as false, for example, did serve their purpose for the poleis of Hellenic civilization. These myths bound man and society, the *ligare* of Aquinas, and gave each individual a place within society, along with the concomitant social roles and institutions. As new experiential realities and discoveries challenged the validity of these myths, the truth of society and the institutional structure on which society was built came under threat of anomie—hence Plato's admonition of a gradual imposition of the new truth so as to "learn by degrees to endure the sight of being." Alexander's consolidation of empire effectively brought the polis system to an end and the political configuration in the West shifted from polis to cosmopolis. Nevertheless, the persistence of rite and myth up through the collapse of the ancient system circa 410 A.D. testifies to the power and persistence of these worldviews as ordering principles in the Western world—to say nothing of their continued existence in other parts of the world and even within small "lifestyle" circles in the United States, even till today.

The decline and fall of Rome thus, according to Voegelin, provides a window into the threat that new and revolutionary worldviews pose to order and representation in political societies. In this case, the threat can best be discerned in the conflict between Christianity and the older pagan worldview, particularly at the disintegration of Western

empire in 410 A.D. Christianity augmented Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy by way of a "radical de-divinization" of the natural world, the result being a shock to the pagan social system and worldview.[43] God's revelation, by way of the *logos*, the word becoming flesh and dwelling among men, testified to the new truth, a truth no longer confined to the Jew only, but now equally accessible to the Gentile as well. By way of "experiential atrophy," the old pagan worldview began to fade from Western minds, though its vestiges continued to live on at least to some degree, particularly among the peasantry. However, with the spread of Christianity and the philosophic elaborations as to the nature of faith, natural law, and so forth, by the Church Fathers, philosophical truth began to be understood in singularly adventitious terms, namely in such terms as the "word made flesh" or the Johannine *Logos*, and culminating in the Pentecostal moment in which the truth of the soul became available to all with an open receptivity to such truth, namely by the moving of the spirit of God.[44]

The scramble within Rome and its empire to come to terms with the new truth that revolutionary Christianity represented is a history of the shoring-up of the vestiges of the Roman civil religion. The Roman experience was one of compactness, or the "inseparable community of gods and men in the historically concrete *civitas*."[45] This in turn engendered the "simultaneousness of human and divine institutions of the social order"[46] —that is, a divinized worldview. Nature was home to both gods and man, and

---

[43] Ibid. 175.

[44] See John 1; Acts 2. The Greek *logos* indicates both the spoken word and the ordering principle of the universe. Stoic thought focuses on the *logos* as an ordering principle to which a wise individual would seek attunement and harmony.

[45] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 159.

[46] Ibid.

indeed, for the ancients, many aspects of nature were considered to be divine. Beginning with Greek philosophy and finally with incorporation of Christianity within the *imperium*, the compact experience of existence, seen in Rome's rites and myths, could no longer adequately serve as the unquestionable civil religion of the empire. Philosophy and Christianity had made too great of an inroad into popular beliefs and experiences for the old cult to go on without intense scrutiny. And despite resistance to the contrary, the divine and mankind could no longer be conceived as inhabiting the same sphere of existence. St. Augustine, following the influence and legacy of Plato, blew the simultaneous and parallel existence of the divine and mankind apart with the separation of the *sacred* sphere of existence from the *profane*. And as Voegelin argues Augustine and other church fathers, did not, and more likely could not, understand the implications of this obliteration of the civil cult of Rome:

> It is curious that both Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, while bitterly engaged in the struggle for existential representation of Christianity, should have been almost completely blind to the nature of the issue. Nothing seemed to be at stake but the truth of Christianity versus the untruth of paganism.[47]

For Augustine, then, the civil theology of the Empire had devolved to the level of untruth that mythological theology held for Plato; hence, Augustine's contention that the civil theology of Rome represents merely "select gods" of the Roman cult,[48] the validity of which rests solely on some expedient quality, and consequently, was to be shunned by the new representatives of the truth (i.e. the Christian community):

> A very great matter is at stake when the true and truly holy divinity is commended to men as that which they ought to seek after and to worship … Wherefore it is

---

[47] Ibid. 158.

[48] St. Augustine, *The City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), 180ff.

> evident beyond doubt that this whole civil theology is occupied in inventing means for attracting wicked and most impure spirits, inviting them to visit senseless images, and through these to take possession of stupid hearts.[49]

St Augustine recognizes the seriousness of the issue confronting his society—i.e., "a very great matter was at stake." The pagan divinities were not simply false, but malevolent spirits that lead souls astray, with the resulting disorder extending into the social realm. Moreover, the political power of the state was actively engaged in facilitating this process; no doubt, due to the fact that political power was inextricably linked to the persuasive power of the civil cult and the vested interests of preserving that cult.

One should recall Plato's admonition that what we are dealing with here is no light matter, "nothing less than the rule of human life." And a very great matter was indeed at stake. The symbols that illuminated Roman society from within could no longer endow Roman civilization with the order necessary for staving off decay from within, nor threats from without. With the conversion of Constantine and, when at last Rome succumbed to the forays of the barbarians in 410, the keepers of the pagan worldview could no longer hold claim in any meaningful way to the existential representation over the remnants of empire. The truth of pagan Roman society could not stand up to the advances in all areas of thought brought by philosophy and Christianity, no matter how vigorous a defense might be mounted for the necessity of the state cult—and what greater proof could be provided than the Gothic conquest in 410? *Fortuna* had been neglected and the calamity that had befallen on Rome was a direct result of the revocation of providential care of the gods due impiety and the turning away from the

[49] Ibid., 181 and 205.

public cult of Rome.[50] (And one here is reminded of the admonitions of religious figures in the United States following September 11, 2001, that the attacks on Washington D.C. and New York City were divine retribution for lasciviousness, debauchery, impiety and a turning away from the providential design God had for the American people.)

What is important for our study is the reactive mechanism within society that, whether consciously or not, sought to fill the vacuum of a diminishing civil religion. Society as a "whole little world" would, or rather, must, achieve and maintain existential representation or it would die (in whatever way particular societies disappear from history). Ancient paganism offered the whole society as the representative of cosmic order. As we have seen, however, this system broke down under the strain of new knowledge and understanding of the natural world, as well as new insights into the individual's affinity to a transcendent order. Philosophy, for instance, opened up the human soul in relation and in relationship with the transcendent divine as a new source for order. Plato's formulation of a *theologia civilis* to serve as a viable civil religion, to bind and order society, a society in which the polis was a macroanthropos and with God as the measure, is a clear enunciation of this new truth. Could the same hold true for Christianity? That is, in light of the truth that Christianity advanced and maintained,

---

[50] Cf. St. Augustine, *City of God*, ch. 19. Augustine writes: "To this supposed deity, whom they call Fortuna, they ascribe so much, indeed, that they have a tradition that the image of her, which was dedicated by the Roman matrons, and called Fortuna Muliebris, has spoken, and has said, once and again, that the matrons pleased her by their homage; which, indeed, if it is true, ought not to excite our wonder. For it is not so difficult for malignant demons to deceive, and they ought the rather to advert to their wits and wiles, because it is that goddess who comes by haphazard who has spoken, and not she who comes to reward merit. For Fortuna was loquacious, and Felicitas mute; and for what other reason but that men might not care to live rightly, having made Fortuna their friend, who could make them fortunate without any good desert? And truly, if Fortuna speaks, she should at least speak, not with a womanly, but with a manly voice; lest they themselves who have dedicated the image should think so great a miracle has been wrought by feminine loquacity."

could Christianity function as a civil religion for a nascent, post-Roman Western civilization?

According to Voegelin's analysis, many attempts were devised to deal with the problem Christianity posed as a political force. The establishment of an orthodoxy in Christianity, however, put an end to Christianity as a political theology. Augustine's distinction between sacred and profane spheres of power rendered the function of Christianity to spiritual concerns, or the maintenance and salvation of healthy human souls. The Church, properly understood, was the representative of the sacred on the earth. The profane power of the state, on the other hand, was charged with the tasks of maintaining public order so as the Church could perform its function of saving souls. As Voegelin writes, "The spiritual destiny of man in the Christian sense cannot be represented on earth by the power organization of a political society; it can be represented only by the church. The sphere of power [i.e. the state] is radically de-divinized; it has become temporal."[51] As such, the existential representative of a political society would no longer be considered as both human and divine, as in so many pagan systems.

This system of "double representation" would come to characterize Western society up through the Middle Ages. Representation in the transcendent sense was, for the time being, limited to the spiritual sphere—that is the church—with moves to divinize the earthly realm tantamount to heresy. However, as medieval society experienced significant earthly progress by the thirteenth century, pressure mounted to give eschatological meaning to this progress, eventually issuing forth in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the ideological and totalitarian movements of the twentieth century.

---

[51] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 174.

In short, modernity brought with it attempts to divinize both man and society, and from this, consequently, the specifically modern problems of representation.[52] The "immanentization of the Christian eschaton" (or the attempt to create an eternal human paradise on the earth) is the crux of this particularly modern problem of representation. Here is where civil religion becomes vital to understanding some fundamental aspects of modern political behavior. Since Augustine's denial of any real meaning to the temporal realm meant that Western Civilization emerged from the Middle Ages without a viable and congruent civil theology for the masses of people, who themselves were becoming acutely aware of their own national identities, new attempts were made to fill the spiritual void with ideological constructions. Hence, for our purposes, civil religion is as useful a concept and tool for both the theorist and practitioner of politics—useful depending on one's motives—as it was for Plato in his own analysis of Athenian society. In the most recent case, it is the neoconservatives serving in both the role of theorists and practitioners who have attempted to apply Plato's insights to American political society. Their attempt, however, reveals that the neoconservatives lacked the acumen of more careful of thinkers, in that these theorists and practitioners stumbled into a form of immanentism, while relatively benign in substance, does nevertheless contain elements similar to past movements, notably the notion of the Unities States representing the vanguard of civilization in the battle against the forces of evil in the world, and with end of history culminating in the universalization of the orthodoxy of the liberal state.

It should be pointed out, therefore, that the immanentization of Christian eschatology, which is so much a focus of Voegelin's work, is at odds with the essence of

[52] Ibid. 175ff.

Christianity in that those formulating ideologies were never able to completely escape the influence of Christian thought and by way of Christianity's massive influence, folded Christian eschatology within their own work. For secular ideologies, then, human salvation was not dependent on a supernatural act of redemption, but rather, could come about by way of human agency alone, be it a final realm of freedom, a classless society, or the liberal state and its promise of inevitable human progress (measured in largely material terms). The Christian experience, much like the life of reason, is an arduous experience, predicated on faith, and is most readily associated with the life of the pilgrim. The pilgrim's life is one of alienation and homelessness, and is characterized by the movement from the state of spiritual imperfection toward sanctification, or the highest good—to that of a new home. This leads to two important aspects concerning immanentist movements springing from the components of Christian symbolism, that of "movement" (teleological) and that of a self-evident truth (axiological). The Christian pilgrimage, that of the sanctification of life, is one of both movement and goal (*telos*), with the goal being the state of supernatural perfection, albeit, perfection attainable only in the next world. The transfer of these Christian symbols to the mundane sphere of existence, to their embodiment in a concrete political society, in order to construct a viable civil theology for masses of the emerging nation-states, is the history of the breakdown of faith in the Christian sense, and the attempt to adapt these Christian symbols to mundane political societies.[53] It is necessary then to understand how civil theologies have come to embody both teleological and axiological elements and how these theologies are promulgated within a political society.

[53] Voegelin, New Science of Politics, 186ff.

CHAPTER TWO

CIVIL RELIGION IN PERSPECTIVE

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary.

—Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

With a broader understanding of Voegelin's analysis of the historical unfolding of representation in the Western world we can thus begin to discern the situation confronting theorists as follows: the disintegration of the pagan worldview and the public cult of Rome provide a concrete example of the scramble within a political society to fill the vacuum of a defunct mass belief system; in the case of Rome, Christianity emerged as a distinctly new ordering principle, as Augustine's duel representation became the basis of civil and spiritual authority; more specifically, Augustine's system of duel representation embodied a dichotomous relationship between the Church as the authoritative representative of the spiritual sphere and the state as the authoritative representative over matters of day-to-day, mundane social order; and again, this system remained intact up through the Middle Ages. But as Voegelin reveals, the political vacuum created by Augustine's philosophy of history eventually led to a spiritual vacuum in modern societies. "Western society emerged from the Middle Ages without a civil theology for the masses of the growing national states; even less likely is there to be discovered in the heritage of the past a civil theology for the industrial society which has

transcended the limits of the national state."[1] The strain on Augustine's system that had developed by the late Middle Ages led to ideological systems that are best understood as corruptions of Christian symbolisms. Hence, our analysis must focus on the foundation on which these ideological constructions developed, and from this analysis, the specifically modern problem of civil religion can begin to be discerned.

Essentially, modern Western political theories have displayed two different approaches to the problem of giving spiritual meaning to politics. One is the notion of a "minimum dogma" of sanctioned beliefs. Under the appeal of the minimum dogma, classical and modern theorists sought to devise a core set of obligatory beliefs or values, to be enforced by the state, while allowing peripheral beliefs to coexist, as long as these peripheral beliefs did not conflict with the core values. The minimum dogma proved to be a resilient and persistent tool for providing society with a foundation of beliefs, and hence, to function as a civil theology. The second is philosophy of history, which gives to history a form (*eidos*), or purpose, or direction, with the concrete political society embodying the *eidos*. It is important to point out at the outset, that, according to Veogelin, such a philosophy of history is a theoretical fallacy; that is, history cannot contain any specific content, direction, or purpose—unless of course, one is considering Augustine's theory of sacred history. The very idea of such an *eidos* of history in mundane existence is a corruption of Christian symbolism, leading ultimately, to the various attempts of giving immanent meaning to society. As Voegelin contends,

> The course of history as a whole is no object of experience; history has no eidos because the course of history extends into the unknown future. The meaning of

---

[1] Eric Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason", *World Technology and Human Destiny*, 35-36.

> history, thus, is an illusion; and this illusionary eidos is created by treating a symbol of faith as if it were a proposition concerning an object of immanent experience.[2]

The attempt to bring meaning and purpose to society is, in great measure, the attempt to bring meaning and purpose to history. And it was the very success of Christianity that brought about the uncertainty experienced by those inhabiting Western civilization, and which, in turn, engendered the quest for certainty. According to Voegelin, "the danger of a breakdown of faith to a socially relevant degree, now, will increase in the measure in which Christianity is a worldly success."[3] More specifically: "The more people are drawn or pressured into the Christian orbit," Voegelin adds, "the greater will be the number among them who do not have the spiritual stamina for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity; and the likeliness of a fall from faith will increase when civilizational progress of education, literacy, and intellectual debate will bring the full seriousness of Christianity to the understanding of ever more individuals."[4] When the hero's adventure that is Christianity, could not be borne by both the masses and the intellectuals of Western society, new projects were initiated to come to terms with abject reality. And on these projects much of the problems of modernity hang. Accordingly, these two measures, that is, the minimum dogma and the *eidos* of history figure in significantly in the attempts to bring certainty to Western Civilization, and hence, attempts to ameliorate the breakdown of faith—or the death of God—by way of "theoretical" contrivances.

---

[2] Ibid., 185-186.

[3] Ibid., 188.

[4] Ibid.

THE RISE AND PERSISTENCE OF THE "MINIMUM DOGMA"

If each whole little world, or cosmion, embodies and represents a higher level of meaning and truth, how this truth becomes established or manifest in a concrete political society is of great practical concern. Much like the scramble in the waning years of the Roman Empire, the modern era reveals the history of the efforts to cope with the problem of the lack of a civil theology for the masses of the emerging nation-states. Moreover, this process intensified given that the experiential atrophy of the Middle Ages not only continued, but actually increased up through modern era, culminating in Nietzsche's famous aphorism that "god is dead"—and with an individualistic, existential philosophy largely filling the vacuum, even among those with strong Christian convictions. An examination of this process of atrophy and response, reveals, as in Voegelin's method, an "intelligible succession of phases in a historical process."

It is important to keep in mind, then, that just as the greater civilizational area can be analyzed as embodying meaning and purpose, so too, does the cosmion. Each little world comprising the greater civilization undergoes a differentiation process, in which symbols are developed and institutionalized and, which in turn, illuminate the society from within. And it is these whole little worlds that are the vessels by which various representations of truth become manifest. Crisis and collapse often speeds up an illumination process that seems as inherent as social life itself, a quality that characterizes Western Civilization from the Middle Ages up through the modern era, through to the so-called post-Modern era. As Sandoz writes, "The political necessity for a generally accepted account of the ultimate reality does not diminish with the crisis or collapse of this or that particular account, but tends to become more acute; and philosophers from

time to time have sought to supply such rational grounds of spiritual and emotional concord (*homonoia*) through civil or political theologies."[5]

Several such efforts have been identified as the modern response to cope with this problem of a lack of a civil theology for the populations of the Western states.[6] The first is referred to as the establishment of a "minimum dogma." As we have seen, Plato was keenly aware of the need to establish *the* true ethical (*ethos*) and political order of society, and to expose as false the mythical and fabulous theologies of the poets. Moreover, Plato was fully aware that the noetic theology of the mystical philosophers was beyond the experiential capacities of the general population. Hence, Plato's construction of a civil theology as a mean between the mythical and noetic theologies, supported by philosophically stated truths and by appeal to common sense (conscience), and which is persuasively embodied by sanctioned poets (*peitho*). One can thus argue that "the outline of the civil theology as a self-conscious enterprise on this first occasion involved assertion of a minimum dogma of creedal truths."[7] This minimum dogma would form the nucleus around which much of the belief structure of a given society was consciously designed to revolve.

The minimum dogma is not limited to Plato, however. As we have seen, the mass beliefs of society often pose a conflict for the life of reason; and it has been argued by some theorists, that political philosophers have often had to couch their true message in somewhat obscure terms in order to avoid the oppression that may result from any insult

---

[5] Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 3.

[6] See, Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason"; Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy."

[7] Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 5.

that may occur in the critique of mass or popular beliefs.[8] The minimum dogma is one contrivance used by modern philosophers to maintain the necessary degree of social order, and at the same time, to secure the personal freedom necessary for the life of reason. As Voegelin writes, "In order to satisfy the masses and at the same time protect the life of reason, philosophers have tried to distill from the life of reason a series of dogmas which everyone is supposed to believe, leaving the masses free to adopt any other beliefs so long as they do not conflict with the minimum dogma."[9] But whereas, Plato's minimum dogma represented a higher degree of truth than the dogma of the myths (i.e., a truer representation of the divine) serving as a barrier to the "true lie" and to the psychic disease within the soul, the minimum dogma of the early modern philosophers was contrived for a more pragmatic purpose. As Sandoz adds, the minimum dogma of modern civil theology is intended "merely to subdue the religious passions that were disruptive of the public peace and dangerous to personal security. One may say that it was at just this point that religion became in the view of the intellectuals 'the opium' of the people later spoken of by Marx."[10]

The minimum dogma, then, becomes a salient feature of our salient concept of civil religion. Hobbes, for instance, constructs his Leviathan, the function of which is to regulate the opinions of men, with the intention of securing "peace and concord": "For the actions of men proceed from their opinions, and in the well governing of opinions

---

[8] See particularly, Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[9] Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason", 36.

[10] Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 7.

consisteth the well governing of men's actions in order to their peace and concord."[11] Moreover, truth is relative when confronted with the necessity of social order: "For doctrine repugnant to peace can no more be true, than peace and concord can be against the law of nature."[12] Hence the claim that such truth is organic in character. Such a claim is offset by Hobbes's conception of the natural world and the limits of human reason. Hobbes places limits on man's "natural knowledge," particularly knowledge limited to the senses, with the natural world being merely a mechanistic-materialistic inter-working of parts—not the least of which, are men's passions. Knowledge of any "higher" purpose, then, is simply predicated on interpretation; and in the milieu of the early modern period, there was no shortage of interpretations involving higher things.

Natural religion, or the drawing forth from nature the truth of God and the natural world seemed one way out of the quandary. But as Oakeshott writes on the situation confronting Hobbes: "Natural religion implies a universal natural Reason; but not only is reasoning confined to what may be concluded from the utterances of the senses, but it is never more than the reasoning of some individual man." As such, the era of Hobbes was destined to be characterized by interpretive strife over the verities of existence; that is, over the function of truth, since each man could potentially reason effectively well from the data received by his senses. Persuasion, not truth, then, is true object of contention—with truth being conflated within articles of faith. According to Hobbes, each man is afforded the opportunity to interpret the scriptures as he sees fit, the result being a devotional conflagration, to which the Puritan Revolution is one natural outgrowth.

---

[11] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 18, p. 233.

[12] Ibid., 233.

How, then, does a civil society tame the excesses of unrestrained faith brought about by the "reformation" of Christianity? As Oakeshott points out:

> To those of Hobbes's contemporaries for whom the authority of medieval Christianity was dead, there appeared to be two possible ways out of this chaos of religious belief. There was first the way of natural religion. It was conceived possible that, by the light of natural Reason, a religion, based upon "the unmovable foundations of truth," and supplanting the inferior religions of history, might be found in the human heart, and receiving universal recognition, become established among mankind. … The other way was that of a civil religion, not the construction of reason but of authority, concerned not with belief but with practice, aiming not at undeniable truth but at peace.[13]

Hobbes takes the latter approach, and consequently, set the stage for the construction of a civil theology which was less ambitious in its purpose and function than that of Plato's. The task of the pragmatic philosopher was to flesh out the dogmatic content for the spiritually liberated and energized society, and to apply it authoritatively: "And civil philosophy, in its project of giving this civil association an intellectual foundation, could not avoid the responsibility of constructing a civil theology, the task of which was to find in the complexities of Christian doctrine a religion that could be an authorized public religion, banishing from civil association the confusion and strife that came from religious division."[14] Hence, Christianity had to be restructured in order to function as the *de facto* civil religion for Hobbes's England, thereby giving the state the sanctioned power to limit immanent outburst by way of controlling its dogmatic content. And whereas theorists such as Spinoza sought to protect the life of reason from encroachment from mass beliefs, Hobbes has the added advantage of providing a sense of order so that individuals can be free to pursue their individual passions—the motor in the workings of

---

[13] Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 75-76.

[14] Ibid., 76.

a mechanistic-materialist worldview—with the state (*Leviathan*) as the supreme regulator of deviant behavior. In time, the harshness of Hobbes's construction would be augmented by the more appealing construction of Locke, whose minimum dogma, wrapped in the shroud of tolerance and self-evident universal rights, essentially served the same pragmatic purpose.[15]

ROUSSEAUIST CIVIL RELIGION

Before examining the contributions of Locke, it is fitting to briefly consider Rousseau's argument in favor of the contrivance of a civil religion, an argument that follows other eighteenth-century political philosophers in its pragmatic purposes. As one of the luminaries of the Enlightenment, Rousseau and his thought are profound and far-reaching. And while Plato introduced the concept of civil theology as a thoroughly philosophic enterprise—namely, in delineating a civil theology for the masses in distinction from both mythological and philosophical theology—Rousseau seems intent on crafting a civil religion that stands singularly on its own. Bellah explains Rousseau's construction in terms of a set of dogmas:

> The phrase "civil religion" is, of course, Rousseau's. In … *The Social Contract*, he outlines the simple dogmas of the civil religion: the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by citizens.[16]

Moreover, Rousseau's influence made an indelible impact on America's early statesmen. As Bellah adds: "While the phrase 'civil religion' was not used, to the best of my

---

[15] See Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy" for a full treatment of this development.

[16] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 26.

knowledge, by the founding fathers … it is clear that similar ideas, as part of the cultural climate of the late eighteenth century, were to be found among the Americans."[17] Such ideas undoubtedly acquiesced under a minimum dogma of sorts, a dogma, which we will see, is predicated on a particular form of semi-secularized Protestantism. Whatever the case may be, as a member of the *philosophes* and a guiding spirit of the Enlightenment, Rousseau's influence on American political thinkers, particularly such men as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin (a fellow *philosophe*), is worth consideration.[18]

Rousseau maintains that the dogmas of civil religion "ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary."[19] This dogmatic contrivance must be grounded within the conception of religion itself. Religion, according to Rousseau, when considered in relation to society, must be understood in two distinct and meaningful ways: the religion of man and the religion of the citizen. Rousseau explains these two types as following:

> The first, which has neither temples, nor altars, nor rites, and is confined to the purely internal cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations of morality, is the religion of the Gospel pure and simple, the true theism, what may be called natural divine right or law. The other, which is codified in a single country, gives it its gods, its own tutelary patrons; it has its dogmas, its rites, and its external cult prescribed by law; outside the single nation that follows it, all the world is in its sight infidel, foreign and barbarous; the duties and rights of man extend for it only

---

[17] Ibid.

[18] *Philosophes* are defined as "any member of a very diverse though loosely associated group of scientist, writers, statesmen, and practical 'men of affairs' whose works and activities constituted the eighteenth-century Enlightenment movement in Europe and America (e.g. Voltaire, Hume, Franklin, Buffon, and Diderot). The philosophes were bound together by their vigorous support of developing the natural sciences, by their insistent (and frequently courageous) challenges to the pervasive influence of outdated traditions, superstition, and prejudice, and by their common desire to facilitate the growth and spread of more liberal and humane political institutions" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995, Ted Honderich, ed., s.v., "Philosophe").

[19] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk. IV, sect. 8. (G. D. H. Cole translation).

> as far as its own altars. Of this kind were all the religions of early peoples, which we may define as civil or positive divine right or law.[20]

For Rousseau, neither type is entirely perfect. The first, namely, Christianity, is purely spiritual, other-worldly focused, and fails to truly bind men to one another, or to the state (i.e., *religāre* in Aquinas's sense). As Rousseau explains:

> But this religion, having no particular relation to the body politic, leaves the laws in possession of the force they have in themselves without making any addition to it; and thus one of the great bonds that unite society considered in severally fails to operate. Nay, more, so far from binding the hearts of the citizens to the State, it has the effect of taking them away from all earthly things. I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit.[21]

The second type of religion is good in that it "unites the divine cult with love of the laws, and, making country the object of the citizens' adoration, teaches them that service done to the State is service done to its tutelary god." Nevertheless, second type of religion, that is, the religion of the citizen, is prone to engendering a blind loyalty to the state, and more importantly, does not contain the binding element—that in Rousseau's words, "true" Christianity contains—necessary for true social solidarity, or the bonds of liberty, equality, and brotherhood.

Thus Rousseau introduces his "civil religion", the function of which is to unite men, giving them meaning and purpose within a social structure, overcoming the alienation and purposeless that rendered Augustine's duel representation susceptible to experiential atrophy. According to Rousseau:

> There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject. While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the State whoever does not believe

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

> them—it can banish him, not for impiety, but as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life to his duty. If any one, after publicly recognizing these dogmas, behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death: he has committed the worst of all crimes, that of lying before the law.

Rousseau clearly delineates a minimum dogma which everyone is expected to believe, with varying amounts of freedom given to supplemental beliefs, as long as those beliefs do not conflict with the minimum dogma, or, in ode to classical civilization, with the duties of citizenship: "Now that there is and can be no longer an exclusive national religion, tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship."[22] The stage is thus set for the refinement of nationalism and the further secularization of society, with liberty, equality, and brotherhood forming the basis for ideological construction. [23]

From Rousseau's influence on the course of political philosophy, particularly in impact of the French Revolution, the minimum dogma would continue to remain a salient feature of political and social theory, even if such a feature remained couched in somewhat vague or obscure terms. Moreover, social solidarity and immanent perfection found roots in Rousseau's thought and became the natural corollary to the worldview prevalent in Hobbes and his peers, namely a mechanistic-materialist orientation. Organic truth, or the notion that what is best for society is none other than that truth that supports the continued existence of society through the securing of "peace and concord," is

---

[22] Ibid.

[23] Rousseau writes on that which the whole social system should rest: "But the social order is a sacred right which is the basis of all other rights. Nevertheless, this right does not come from nature, and must therefore be founded on conventions. …that, instead of destroying natural inequality, the fundamental compact substitutes, for such physical inequality as nature may have set up between men, an equality that is moral and legitimate, and that men, who may be unequal in strength or intelligence, become every one equal by convention and legal right" (*Social Contract*, Bk. I, sect. 1).

conventional truth, or truth predicated on a contrivance of a minimum dogma. The result of these developments is the general drift toward ideological constructions. Thus, emphasis must now turn to the other modern attempts to cope with the lack of a civil theology for Western civilization, ideologies proper, and the more tempered approaches of the Lockean system and constitutional-democracy.

IMMANENTIST MOVEMENTS AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

Early modern theorists responded to the need for meaning and purpose for society by way of a fundamental consensus on a minimum dogma in regard to civil theology. The expression of a minimum dogma varied from theorist to theorist, but the fundamental agreement presupposed that the objective of a minimum dogma was to suppress the religious passions that threatened public peace and social order. This consensus diverted considerably with Plato's conception of a minimum dogma, in that, there was no higher truth to be pursued, a least a truth understood as existing outside of society itself; rather, society itself would become the embodiment of truth and its self-interpretation the justification for the veracity of such truth. Indeed, the pragmatic rationale of securing the public peace precluded any theoretical exploration of the Platonic-Aristotelian type. Enlightenment, following the work of Machiavelli, stripped away any higher purpose to political philosophy. Political science became, in large measure, the art of political expediency. Consequently, public peace developed into an end in itself, while the *summum bonum* (or highest good), the "life of reason," and classical political theory in general, no longer a matter for serious speculation. As the Positivistic era dawned and matured, such "philosophic" endeavors were reduced to metaphysical speculation.

Moreover, the perfectionism implied in positivism would in turn open the door to new and, more often than not, increasingly destabilizing ways to give meaning and purpose to societies caught in the maelstrom of a de-divinized natural world.

The minimum dogma proved versatile and persistent as an organizing principle in the modern era and proved influential in the development of immanentist movements, each of a differing quality and intensity. Thus to the minimum dogma must be added what Voegelin describes as "the attempts of sectarian communities to impose by force their immanentist beliefs on a society as a state cult."[24] These attempts, in essence, constitute concrete attempts to re-divinized society. Re-divinization, however, is not to be construed as a revival of polytheism or as a neopagan cultural adaptation; modern re-divinization, has, in Voegelin's words, "its origins rather in Christianity itself, deriving from components that were suppressed as heretical by the universal church."[25] Specifically, re-divinization is the incorporation of Christian eschatological expectations and symbolisms that are otherworldly in orientation into an existing political society. The two primary components of the Christian symbolism are teleological (movement) and axiological (a standard of truth).[26] With re-divinization, we find a society endowed with axiological meaning and moving toward perfection in this-world. As Voegelin explains: "the goal, the *telos*, toward which the movement is directed, is understood as ultimate perfection; and since the goal is a state of highest value, the second component is

---

[24] Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason", 36.

[25] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 175.

[26] See Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*, 186ff., and *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 298ff.

called the axiological."[27] From the corruption of these symbols comes the peculiar problem of immanentism in the modern world: from mild pathologies of certain progress or abstract scribblings of imagined utopias, to the activist agendas of ideological revolutionaries. Associated with the first concept are theories concerning human progress; hence, liberal ideas on the gradual unfolding of human society based on rationally constructed institutions and the inevitable progress of liberal societies contain certain teleological judgments as to how human social organization will unfold. According to Voegelin:

> To the first type of variation, the teleological, belongs progressivism of all variants. When the teleological component is immanentized, the chief emphasis of the [immanentist-political] idea lies on the forward movement, on the movement toward a goal of perfection in this world.[28]

On the other hand, there are the axiological components concerning certain perceived truths of human existence, based on speculative knowledge, particularly the form of a society in which all prior contradictions, inequalities, or inefficiencies can be resolved; immanentism tends to magnify these axioms into romantic notions of human goodness along with the real possibility of their attainment in a utopian society. As Voegelin explains:

> To the second type of derivation, the axiological, the emphasis of the idea falls on the state of perfection in the world. Conditions for a perfect social order are described and worked out in detail and assume the form of an ideal image. Such an image was first sketched by Thomas More in his *Utopia*. But the design for perfection need not always be as carefully worked out as it is in More. Much more common are those depictions of a desirable final state that are designed as negatives [i.e., opposites] of some specific evil in the world.[29]

---

[27] Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, in *Modernity Without Restraint,* ed. Manfred Henningsen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 298.

[28] Ibid., 299.

[29] Ibid.

These two components, however, are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be combined into an activist agenda that seeks to bring the axiomatic notions of society in to being. "In the third type of derivation," Voegelin explains, "the two types are immanentized together, and there is present both a conception of the end goal and the knowledge of the methods by which it is to be brought about."[30] This agenda can be relatively benign, as in American foreign policy doctrines that seek to spread to freedom, democracy, and market principles across the globe, or in radical immanentist movements that seek, by revolution, to bring about heaven on earth, by way of human agency.

Notable examples of radical immanentist movements include: the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, the National-Socialist Revolution, and the Communist Revolution (or rather, communistic revolutions, extending from the Bolsheviks, to Mao Tse-tung, to the Khmer Rouge, and so on). All of these movements contain notions of immanent eschatological fulfillment, or the movement of society toward the end of history—i.e., a philosophy *of* history. In addition, these movements embody what can be called the "imperial representation of truth."[31] The political and legal constructions resulting from imperial truth include: The notion that the political society is in harmony with the truth of history; that the aim of the society is to establish and secure the realm of freedom and peace; that the opponents of society run counter to the truth of history and will ultimately be defeated; no opponent can "legitimately" be at war with such a society, but rather, "must be a representative of untruth in history, or, in

[30] Ibid., 300.

[31] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 134-135.

contemporary language, an aggressor"; and finally, "the victims are not conquered, but liberated from their oppressors, and therewith from the untruth of their existence."[32]

Such immanentism, again, is not confined to revolutionary movements. Any ideological construction that seeks to impose on history a "form," that is, a purposeful or deterministic course toward a state of perfection or finality—or, an end of history as such—runs the risk of immanentist tendencies. Thus, even proponents of liberalism as the endpoint of human ideological development display a degree of immanentism. As Francis Fukuyama wrote on the end of the Cold War: "The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of all viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism."[33] Here we see the determinism that marks immanentist creeds. And as Fukuyama adds, "What we may be experiencing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history; but the end of history as such: that is the end point of humanity's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[34] Thus even within liberal thought, thought that is predicated on axioms of human progress, there exists a philosophy of history.

All of the preceding examples display the problem of a form (*eidos*) of history; explicitly, giving to history meaning and purpose, to be fulfilled, in the end, by a concrete political society. Such a form to history was not problematic in classical politics, in that, classical understanding of history was cyclical, with all things subject to a rhythm of

---

[32] Ibid., 135.

[33] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History", in *America and the World,* Gideon Rose ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002), 2.

[34] Ibid.

growth, maturity, and decay. This, according to Voegelin, entails the "mystery of existence"; as history plods on, on a course unknown and unknowable to human minds—only the rhythm of existence is discernable. Christianity, however, broke with this rhythm of existence and gave meaning and form to history, albeit, it is a history that culminates in the transcendent destiny of man, achieved only by grace, and not amenable to human design. As Voegelin states, with Christianity, "man and mankind have now have fulfillment [with the arrival of Christian soteriological truth], but it lies beyond nature."[35] Hence, the problem of an *eidos* of history, as in the totalitarian movements and in Fukuyama's "End of History," emerge with the corruption of the Christian teleological and axiological symbolism—that is, when the "Christian transcendental fulfillment becomes immanentized."[36]

While Fukuyama's essay can be seen as an eristic argument to stimulate the debate over the future course of human affairs, there is little doubt that such conceptions of liberal capitalist democracy as the end of human ideological development abound in the policy of the United States and international bodies (e.g., the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, etc). Take for instance the following statements: "We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a problem. And we will lead the world in opposing it." Or again: "The 20th century ended with the single surviving model of human progress, based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private

[35] Voegelin, The New Science of Politics, 185.

[36] Ibid.

property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance." And finally, "When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations. The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and the entire Islamic world."[37] These remarks, delivered by President George W. Bush at the commencement ceremonies at West Point in 2002 sum up some of the fundamental tenets of the Western liberal model. And here again we are confronted with problems regarding representation. Indeed, the preceding analysis highlights one of the central issues confronting Voegelin: "Are all political societies monadic entities, expressing the universality of truth by their universal claim of empire?"[38] Or again, "Is the clash of empires [or perhaps cultures or civilizations] the only test of truth, with the result that the victorious power is right?"[39] The United States, in the words of Bush, is the leader and defender of the free world, engaged in an existential conflict with the forces of evil. Moreover, due to its position in the struggle, the United States embodies a transcendental truth, and its "mission" is to spread and protect these universal truths everywhere: "the United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere."[40] These sentiments sound similar to the characteristics of "imperial truth" described above and used to identify totalitarian movements.

The remarks of Fukuyama and Bush also sound strikingly familiar to what Oakeshott describes as the one of the two possible solutions confronting theorists of

---

[37] George W. Bush, "West Point Commencement Speech", in *America and the World,* Gideon Rose ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002), 368, 370.

[38] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*,

[39] Ibid.

[40] Office of the White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. September 2002.

Hobbes's era: "by the light of natural Reason, a religion, based upon 'the unmovable foundations of truth,' and supplanting the inferior religions of history, might be found in the human heart, and receiving universal recognition, become established among mankind."[41] This presents a perplexing problem: Can the natural religion espoused by Enlightenment philosophers be essentially the same as the pragmatic civil religion of Hobbes and Rousseau? That is, that behind the specious arguments testifying to the virtues and benefits of universal rights, toleration, and the "final form" of human social organization, lies a minimum dogma of a distinctly Western civil theology? To this we must turn to both civil government in the Lockean sense and to constitutional-democracy in the broader sense.

LOCKE'S CIVIL GOVERNMENT AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

Thus far we have examined two approaches devised by modern theorists to cope with the problem of a lack of a civil theology for Western societies. The first approach is that of a minimum dogma. This approach is highly useful, in that it extrapolates a core set of beliefs or values which everyone in society is expected to adhere to. Additional beliefs are not ruled out, as long as those beliefs do not conflict with the minimum dogma. The modern version of the minimum dogma differs considerably from that of Plato's, whose aim was to remedy the disease of the soul, or the arch-lie, in that it seeks merely to secure necessary peace and order—either to allow so-called philosophers to pursue the "life of reason", or in the case of Hobbes, to allow individuals to be free to

[41] Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1975), 75.

pursue their passions. The second approach is that of "immanentist movements" seeking to impose by force their particular beliefs as the state cult. Notable examples include the Puritans under Cromwell in England, the French Revolution, the Marxist revolutions of the twentieth century, and Hitler's Third Reich. Such immanentism is not limited to these revolutionary movements, however. Even within liberal thought there is a tendency to obfuscate progress and immanentism. Thus George W. Bush's notion to promote the values of the United States because these principles are "right and true for all people everywhere" ventures into the realm of immanentism, and displays the minimum dogma of a unique civil theology. It remains necessary, therefore, to examine more closely the civil theology of liberalism, and its concrete form in both Locke's civil government and its derivative constitutional-democracy.

With Locke we can begin to draw attention to the attempts to pass off as an organic civil religion, the postulates of which are universally applicable, the contrivances of a sub-set of the population. As Sandoz writes, "When we realize the extent to which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries acknowledged the necessity of a civil theology … it is not implausible to suppose that [Locke's] covert intention in the *Second Treatise* may have been to advance a civil theology in the form of an evocative naturalistic myth of civil government."[42] Whether such a notion was intentional or not, is open to dispute, but the similarities between Locke and other theorists, particularly Hobbes, is significant. As Sandoz adds, "Civil theology typically incorporates doctrinal formulations of the insight of reason into order by using mythic imagery, and the mythic cast of Locke's work supports the surmise that at least part of his intention in writing may have been to

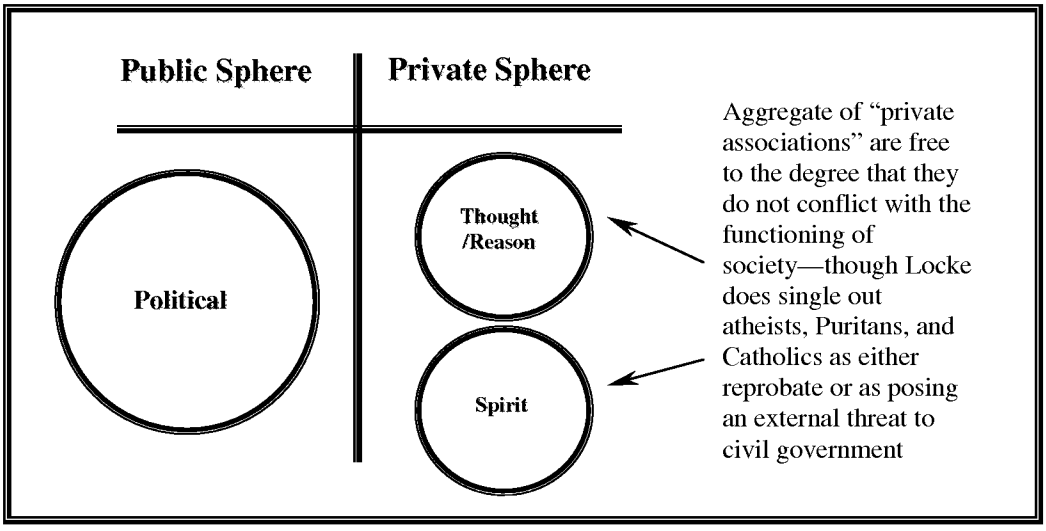
[42] Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 11.

communicate a civil theology."[43] Accordingly, couched in Locke's formulation of life, liberty, property rights, toleration, and so forth, is the evocation of mythic imagery (or symbolism), a mythopoeic process similar to Plato's, but with the pragmatic intention of Locke's modern peers.

How, then, does Locke's work support the previous efforts of modern theorists such as Hobbes? It may be said that Locke's construction is the "spoonful of sugar" to the Hobbesian medicine; that modernity's attempt to tame the religious passions that inflamed much of Western Europe had reached a mature position with Locke, with civil government developing as the standard for social organization. The basic premise of Locke's civil government is the separation of a *natural* public sphere, which alone constitutes the "political," from a private sphere containing the life of reason and spirit (or religion). Thus between the sphere of the public and the private is a "wall of separation," with activities occurring within the private sphere free from state coercion, insofar as these activities do not conflict with the functioning of society and the civil government (See Figure 1).

[43] Ibid.

Figure 1: Locke's Civil Government



Hence, there is no state cult or the attempt to establish one therewith—a feature embodied to this day in the "Establishment Clause" of the United States Constitution. Religious denominations, sects, and creeds are reduced to private associations and are free to practice their speculative articles of faith so long as their practical effects do not impinge upon the *material* well-being of others.

Locke's minimum dogma, then, is folded into a judicious balance between tolerance and intolerance, with the core values being that of semi-secularized Protestant community. As Voegelin describes it, "the civil government [of Locke] operates on the premise that the way of life of a liberal-protestant community must and will become the way of life of the nation." Hence, it is argued that Locke continues on the course set by his modern peers, which amounts to, in the words of Sandoz, "his systematic intention to break with the classical and Christian tradition in philosophy and religion while appearing to be the true advocate of that tradition."[44] Again, whether such a systematic

[44] Ibid.

break was intentional or not, it is important to point out the various readings of Locke's thought in relation to Hobbes and other prominent theorists,[45] notably in whether Locke's thought embodies the traditional English interpretation of the Bible along the lines of Richard Hooker, or whether Locke was overtly hedonistic (as with Hobbes) in his utilitarian leanings as in the *Letter Concerning Toleration* and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; what is significant here, is that the milieu in which Locke operated precluded a truly neutral rendering of a political theory for English society and that Locke's influence on the development of civil government and constitutional-democracy contains an inherent bias and is not as neutral as it may at first appear.

Indeed, Locke's bias is not too far from the surface. As Locke writes in the *Second Treatise*: "The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting."[46] Or again in the *First Letter Concerning Toleration*:

> The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like. … It is the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws, to secure unto all the people in general and to every one of his subjects in particular the just possession of these things belonging to this life.[47]

Moreover, Locke adds the distinction between sacred and profane duties, with the magistrate limited to the latter: "the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to

---

[45] Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), 202ff; and John Yolton, "Locke on the Law of Nature", *The Philosophical Review* 67, no. 4 (October, 1958) for differing interpretations of the impact of Locke's thought.

[46] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. IX, 124.

[47] John Locke, *First Letter Concerning Toleration,* 6.

these civil concernments, and that all civil power, right and dominion, is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls."[48]

Such a conception of civil authority is a far cry from Plato or Aristotle's theories of politics (or even the essence of Christianity) where the purpose of civil association is to facilitate the movement (*telos*) of the full actualization of man and society—i.e., the participation in the *Logos* and divine *Nous*. With Locke, rather, emphasis is again placed on peace and concord, namely through the regulation of opinions. Consequently, "no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate."[49] Thus, along with semi-secularized Protestantism, a materialistic bias of Hobbes is carried forward in Locke's theory concerning distributive justice, as well as in his notion of natural rights, the chief purpose of which, is to secure public order.

Despite the evidence of such biases, the source of order for Locke, the content of the natural law, is the Christian God and the divine laws that flow through men. Like Hobbes, Locke did not completely abandon the classical and Christian tradition; at the very least, Locke valued the vestiges of those traditions and sought to reformulate them for contemporary contingencies. Nevertheless, here again we find a considerable break with classical theorists. Rather than participation in the *Logos* or divine *Nous*, Locke remains bound by the conventions of the times, and reveals the mechanistic-materialistic

[48] Ibid., 7

[49] Ibid.

bias in regard to the nature of God.[50] While Locke presents a rather difficult picture of reality and man's ability to cogently capture the true aspects of reality, Locke's theology is remarkably simply, in that it seeks to serve a rather pragmatic purpose, that of securing material well-being. Nevertheless, the bias inherent in Locke's theology is equivocal and somewhat incoherent, a situation perhaps best expressed by Voegelin: "Could it be that behind [Locke's] formulae of freedom and toleration hides the orthodoxy of a liberal, semi-secularized Protestant church-state?"[51]

This orthodoxy is carried forward into Locke's epistemology. Locke, as with Hobbes and other thinkers of the Enlightenment, tends to reduce knowledge to sense perception, thereby limiting the philosophical enterprise. And whereas Aristotle argues that understanding based on sense perception is of limited philosophical use, Locke and his peers elevate such understanding. The wise person, according to Aristotle, "has knowledge of all things as far as possible, without, however, having it about each particular … the one who is capable of knowing difficult things, i.e., things not easily known by human beings, is the wise person; for sense-perception is common to everyone, and that is why it is easy and not characteristic of wisdom."[52] "Difficult things," involved the higher things, and the highest thing of all, the *summum bonum*, is the chief quest of philosophy and the philosopher. Locke, however, questions the whole

---

[50]Ellis Sandoz expresses one view of Locke's theology: "Insofar as Locke's God participates in reality, He is the deistical mechanic of Newton's mechanistic universe": Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy", 21; The counterview to this deistic reading is expressed by Paul E. Sigmund: "Locke was clearly a theist, and like Aquinas believed that faith confirms and supplements reason in a purposive universe governed by divine providence", Paul E. Sigmund ed., The *Selected Political Writings of John Locke*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 184.

[51] Eric Voegelin, The Oxford Political Philosophers", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, issue 11, (April, 1953), 97-114.

[52] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a

philosophic enterprise and labels it as futile: "The mind has a different relish, as well as the palate … Hence it was, I think, that the philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether *summum bonum* consisted in riches or body delights, or virtue, or contemplation."[53] Every individual has his or her own conception of, or relishes, that which is good. Accordingly, a political society is constituted best when these individuals' conceptions are brought to bear and aloud to flourish within a minimum framework of government and law. Could it be, then, that behind Locke's formulae of human understanding hides the orthodoxy of belief and practice intended to maintain social stability by precluding the destabilizing effects of philosophy and the quest for the higher things?

That Locke's political formulations contain an inherent bias is without doubt. What is more, this bias is carried forward into the other great development to cope with a lack of civil theology for the West, namely constitutional-democracy. Built largely upon "self-evident" truths and the principles of nature and nature's God, this system proved adaptable to the contingencies of modernity, and indeed, malleable in certain cultural settings. And herein lies the source of difficulties. In order to effectively cope with such contingencies, it must presuppose, in the words of Voegelin, "that the constitution itself is in a way an article of faith, that 'constitutional democracy' is the predominant mass creed, the civil theology of society."[54] Moreover, the minimum dogma inherent in this system stipulates that if this provision is accepted to a socially significant degree, the society can be "'pluralistic' to the extent that that free reign is given the residues of

---

[53] John Locke,

[54] Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason", 37.

intellectual and spiritual movements (churches, sects, ideologies, and last but not least, philosophy), assuming that they will live side by side without subverting the constitutional structure."[55] More importantly, the essence of this system has developed an aura of finality, in that, its proponents have touted it, rather successfully, as the premier social, economic, and political organization for humanity, and have engendered an exhaustive institutional structure that seeks to implement its tenets globally.

CIVIL RELIGION IN PERSPECTIVE

The recurring theme expressed in the various modern attempts to establish a civil theology for the nation states of Western civilization—from the Reformation, to the Enlightenment, to Marxism, positivism, liberalism, and so forth—is the modern derivative of "self-salvation." What further links the various attempts examined above, is the conception of a social compact, a convention binding individuals to one another, and the individual to the preeminent political institution, the state. This compact is similar but not altogether identical with the other great binding element, the covenant. Israel stands as the classic case of a people in a covenantal relationship with the divine. But with Western Civilization, the divine was cut off from a political union with a human political community. De-divinization was all but complete—at least were it mattered most, as with the *philosophes* and men of "practical affairs." Enlightenment would not stand for mere superstition in the public assemblies the bourgeoning nation states. Science, technology, and more importantly, progress, were indicative of mankind's autonomy and prowess.

---

[55] Ibid.

Uncertainty, however, continued to plague the Western mind. With the spread of Christianity and its truth throughout Western Civilization, and with the breakdown of faith to a socially significant degree—brought about in large part by the very success of Christianity—the quest for certainty trumped other issues, most notably, by the self-imposed proscription of any inquiry whatsoever into the highest good—at least in classical philosophical terms. And with growing populations, cities, markets, and the inevitable natural calamities, the primary source of uncertainty was most readily discernable in the natural world itself. Nature would be tamed, savages would be folded into the truth of Western Civilization, and markets would be opened on all corners of the earth. Self-salvation could and would be translated into tangible wealth.

The truth of Christianity, moreover, precluded any fall back into antiquated worldviews (e.g. cosmological empire, monistic religious experiences, paganism, and so forth); hence, the search within Western societies was one of coping with uncertainty without drifting too far from the primary source of its order—namely, Christianity. Voegelin chooses the term *gnosticism* to describe the modern attempts to come to terms with the inadequacies of Christianity and its inability to cope with the problems of a growing and restless Western civilization. Using Voegelin's "new science," one can discern the emergence of "the image of a society, identifiable and intelligible as a unit by its *evolution* as the unique type of gnostic truth" (emphasis mine).[56] Western societies settled into Locke's civil government and variations on the Rousseauist's "minimum dogma" themes, and the liberal-constitutional state became the primary political institution.

---

[56] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 192.

As significant as these developments were to the history books, the gnostic tendencies in these systems implied a drift from Christian symbolism of otherworldly salvation to society's self-salvation, or what Voegelin would come to explain as "modernity without restraint." The immanentist implications here are clear. Voegelin labels this drift from the transcendent as the "egophanic revolt," characterized by the divinization of human society, its apotheosis, and the notion of self-salvation. The truth of society became inextricably linked to truth itself. As political theorist Leo Strauss writes in the introduction of *On Tyranny*, "there is a disproportion between the intransigent quest for truth and the requirements of society, or that not all truths are harmless. Society will always try to tyrannize thought."[57] Hence, Hobbes's "organic truth" can be understood in a new light; namely, the modern bourgeois state could not be distracted by an uncompromising search for some higher truth, not while there was wealth to be made and possessions to be acquired.

In the United States, however, the development of a viable civil theology took a unique turn. While the American political experiment would be constructed at the very height of the Enlightenment, Americans still maintained an intimate connection with the divine. America, much like ancient Israel, displayed a covenantal tradition. Whereas the continental experience shed itself from the transcendent and chose instead the social compact over that of the "state of nature," the United States would affirm its relationship to the divine in its most fundamental statement of American political philosophy, the Declaration of Independence. America's Sinai Moment culminated on July 4, 1776 in Philadelphia with the appeal to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." In a sense,

[57] Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon's Hiero's*, (New York: Free Press, 1991).

the covenant remained intact. Nevertheless, no sooner than the new republic was founded than its identity and its covenantal tradition came under threat.

CHAPTER THREE

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION IN PERSPECTIVE

Be virtuous and you will be eccentric
—Mark Twain

The American civil religion, as with other civil religions, is in large part an element in the symbolic structure of a human political society, particularly in that society's self-interpretation of itself. The problem constantly remains, however, of congruence between the symbols generated by society and the symbols of political science—or those symbols prompted and incorporated by theorist to understand the symbolic structure of society. Civil religion is one such symbol utilized by political theorists to understand aspects of society not completely amenable to direct observation. It helps to begin such an inquiry, then, with the notion that each human society has external dimensions that can be interpreted as existing in a larger environment. But each society must also be considered as a little world (or *cosmion*) illuminated with meaning from within. Accordingly, when analyzing the deeper aspects of a political society, that is, its internal aspects, the theorist must continue with an examination of pre-existing symbols society utilizes in its self-interpretation and proceed toward clarifying these pre-existing symbols and their overall function within society. Moreover, this internal dimension is of considerable theoretical concern in the scientific investigation of politics,

in that the internal dimension reveals the self-generating symbols of society and how these symbols are incorporated into a distinct, if yet mutable, *way of life*.

With this approach in mind, two sets of symbols in particular can be discerned as salient features of any political society, the political and the religious. These symbols converge in what is often a rather conflict-laden relationship. How this conflict is either assuaged or intensified forms the backdrop of an understanding of civil theology. In the American political experience, these two sets of symbols combine in what can be described as an organic relationship *within* the public sphere, forming in essence, the older or traditional American civil religion. In this sense, the American civil religion differs considerably from the civil theologies of the modern period, in that "peace and concord" is not the primary motivation. Accordingly, the traditional American civil religion cannot be considered entirely in the vein of modern attempts to cope with a lack of a civil theology for Western civilization. Rather, it reveals an organic and empirical evolution of a somewhat compact political-religious experience, developing along with changes in the American political regime. The American civil religion, then, reveals an uneasy relationship between the *ends* of government, as delineated in the Declaration of Independence—and its symbolic expression of "self-evident" truths—and the *means* to achieve these ends as delineated in its chief legal document, the United States Constitution. Furthermore, the American civil religion reveals a similar complication concerning the basic political system of the United States, a complication rooted in the seemingly irreconcilable tension between the two "regime types" that characterize the American political system, namely, classical republicanism and the modern liberal-constitutional state. Robert Bellah, for instance, defines classical republicanism as the

political tradition that originated in the city-states of classical Greece and Rome and which proved highly influential in the formation of modern Western democracies:

> It presupposes that the citizens of a republic are motivated by civic virtue as well as self-interest. It views public participation as a form of moral education and sees its purposes as the attainment of *justice* and the *public good.* [1]

Classical republicanism is particularly prominent in Tocqueville's analysis of the United States. Liberalism, as we have seen, is concerned primarily with individual liberty and social progress, with the liberal state essentially in a neutral, passive role and not actively engaged in moral education or the shaping of citizens into a particular character. Arthur Schlesinger introduces a similar distinction between what he refers to as two "theories" of America, namely "America as experiment"—or the notion that the Founding Fathers recognized the terminable quality of American political society— and "America as destiny"—or the notion of American exceptionalism, and a nation and people endowed with a transcendent mandate and a special role in history.[2] With these key concepts in mind in mind, we are able to distinguish what Robert Bellah refers to as the American civil religion proper, or those political symbols that illuminate American political society from within—including such notions of the American Creed, America's covenantal tradition, and so forth. As Bellah concludes, "What we have, then, from the earliest days of the republic, is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity." [3] In essence, the traditional American civil religion takes all of the aspects of Protestant religious experience, removes them from

---

[1] Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 335.

[2] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History,*3ff. America as "experiment" or destiny" will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

[3] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 29.

specific Christian affiliations, and applies these aspects to political life, creating a sense of concord amongst the American population. In this manner the American civil religion parallels many aspects of Christianity, all the while maintaining neither any sectarian leanings or becoming in any specific manner Christian.

THE AMERICAN CREED

Despite their differences, implicit in both regime types and theories of America is the "cluster of ideas, institutions, and habits" comprising the American Creed.[4] Building on the work of Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, historian Arthur Schlesinger describes the American Creed as a system of general ideals held in common by Americans, across a broad rage of demographic characteristics. Much like Aquinas's *ligare,* the American Creed serves, according to Schlesinger, as "the bond that links all Americans . . . and as the spur forever goading Americans to live up to their principles."[5] But whereas one theory of America views its existence as a trial and error experiment, built on the knowledge of past failures, and with no guarantee that the United States would not meet the same fate of the classical republics, the other embodies certain mystical elements, and views the United States as the product of divine intervention into human affairs. The former embodies shades of Augustine's "providential history", while the latter embodies American "exceptionalism." In biblical terms, the latter can be conceived as the Word as *initially* made manifest in the body of Jesus Christ, and saved

---

[4] Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992), 27; Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 21; see also Samuel P. Huntington, "Paradigms of American Politics: Beyond, the One, the Two, and the Many," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 1, 19-22.

[5] Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, 27.

till the "latter days" to became manifest in American political society—namely, in the political institutions of an Anglo-Saxon, Protestant people, who fled the persecutions of a corrupt, and increasingly "enlightened" and godless land, to found the *novus ordo seclorum.* America, in short, is a redeemer nation. And like the Biblical examples of the Old Testament Hebrew people and the New Testament Christ and Christian Church, the American people were subjected to trial and adversity. "Chosen people," Schlesinger reminds us, "underwent the harshest trials and assumed the most grievous burdens. The rival propositions . . . thus shared a belief in testing."[6] But whereas America as experiment tested works, or the tangible effects of policy and social behavior, America as destiny tested the faith of the American people—that is, their faith in God's providential care and America's messianic mission in the world.

In 1782, in his *Letters From an American Farmer*, Jean de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman and a loyalist during the American Revolutionary period, wrote that "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men."[7] Crèvecoeur's observations, which in a certain sense are a presage to the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, can be understood as the first attempt to define the "American Character" and what exactly it means to be an American:

> The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.—This is an American.

---

[6] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 15.

[7] Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, "What is an American," in *Letters from an American* Farmer, Letter III.

And much like the work of another Frenchman, Montesquieu, and his search for a "general spirit" animating political societies, Crèvecoeur illustrates some of the fundamental aspects of the characteristics of the American people. Foremost, Crèvecoeur differentiates the Old World versus that of the New World, a familiar theme in American lore. In his *Letters*, a romantic vision of a distinct American political society is presented. Americans, it is maintained, live a life closer to nature—or life as it is meant to be lived. Enlightenment, for its part, had taken its toll in the Old World, engendering, as it were, a vastly over-complicated, corrupted human society. In Crèvecoeur's observations, corrupted human nature is given a second chance in the new world. Assimilation of immigrants into the American character—what would later be described as the great "melting pot"—is part of this process. Moreover, Crèvecoeur emphasizes a strong commercial and entrepreneurial spirit in Americans along with a strong sense of rugged individualism. The New World welcomes the European with a new hope and promise along with a charge:

> Welcome to my shores, distressed European; bless the hour in which thou didst see my verdant fields, my fair navigable rivers, and my green mountains!—If thou wilt work, I have bread for thee; if thou wilt be honest, sober, and industrious, I have greater rewards to confer on thee--ease and independence. I will give thee fields to feed and clothe thee; a comfortable fireside to sit by, and tell thy children by what means thou hast prospered; and a decent bed to repose on. I shall endow thee beside with the immunities of a freeman. If thou wilt carefully educate thy children, teach them gratitude to God, and reverence to that government, that philanthropic government, which has collected here so many men and made them happy. I will also provide for thy progeny; and to every good man this ought to be the most holy, the most powerful, the most earnest wish he can possibly form, as well as the most consolatory prospect when he dies. Go thou and work and till; thou shalt prosper, provided thou be just, grateful, and industrious.[8]

[8] Ibid.

From Crèvecoeur we can begin to gain an understanding of not only what it is to be an American, but the hope that America held out for so many people in the Old World. But apart from an American "character," it is necessary to gain an understanding of what has been described as the American Creed, for creed postulates a much firmer line of commitment than simply character.

The term creed stems from the Latin *credos* ("I believe") and can indicate either a formal statement of religious belief or a confession of faith, and is generally associated with that of an individual or group of individuals and their expressed commitments to doctrinal beliefs.[9] Similarly, the term creed may be thought of more broadly, indicating a system of beliefs, principles, or values that can be associated with commitment to such a doctrine by a larger political population, albeit not overtly expressed in any formal matter. The latter conception is particularly useful to this analysis, in that the American civil religion is bound to a system of beliefs, principles and values and held in general by American political society. The "American Creed" can thus be described as a commitment to a constitutional, fully-representative government, articulated down to the last individual—namely, Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, for the people"—a federal system of government, in which sub-national governments retain considerable political control over their jurisdictions, and the sacrosanct principles of liberty,

[9] On April 3, 1918, at the height of U.S. involvement in World War I, the United States Congress adopted the following as the official "The American's Creed" : "I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed; a democracy in a republic; a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies."

equality, and the rule of law. These distinct parts, or "self-evident" truths, are upheld as universal principles, equally applicable to other cultures and civilizations of the world as they are to the United States. Needless to say, this belief can and does incite various degrees of trepidation by cultures in which these "universal principles" are foreign to local tradition—generally instigating feelings that American rhetoric about spreading democracy implies imposing such principles against the will of those cultures. But what is perhaps more provocative is that the creed contains the notion of a people set apart and historically differentiated; a new Israel, a "city on the hill," with the imminent and immanent promise of the salvation for all of mankind.[10] The implications of this creed are manifest to considerable degree—both domestically and internationally—in the United States' license to uphold and promote these principles at both home and abroad.

The implications of the notion of destiny on the national psyche of Americans are profound. From the Declaration of Independence's "with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence," to Franklin D. Roosevelt's December 8, 1941 rally address and its assurance that America in its "righteous might" would overcome adversity during the Second World War, to President George W Bush's declaration that freedom is the Almighty's gift to the world, along with the notion of the United States under divine protection, the instrument of divine retribution, and as the means that would implement the divine plan of freedom, it is clear that mystical elements have shaped the formation of the American Creed—and subsequently shaped national

[10] See Schlesinger, *The Cycles of American History,* 3-22.

policies. Hence, the venerable tradition of the Founders, "yielded to the mystical idea of an American national destiny."[11]

CIVIL RELIGION IN AMERICA

In 1967, Robert Bellah instigated a heightened interest in the concept of civil religion in an article entitled "Civil Religion in America."[12] In the article Bellah argues in favor of the existence of a phenomenon characterized as a complex and well-institutionalized political-religious experience that informs a larger and fairly inclusive religious dimension in America's communal affairs. "Few have realized," affirms Bellah, "that there actually exists alongside of and rather differentiated from the churches an elaborated and well-institutionalized civil religion in America."[13] This religious dimension is exemplified by a set of semiconscious beliefs and played out by members of society through their thoughts and actions—e.g., through public beliefs, symbols and rituals. Bellah says, "This religion--there seems to be no other word for it—while not antithetical to, and indeed sharing much in common with, Christianity, was neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian."[14] Moreover, the political-religious experience in no way amounts to a form of national self-worship, hubris, or jingoism, but rather represents the subjection of the nation as a whole to a divine or transcendent measure, witness, and judge. It reveals a covenantal relation between American political society and the "Supreme Judge of the World." In this sense, Civil Religion provided the

---

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Dædalus* 96, Winter 1967, no. 1, 21-37.

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] Ibid., 12.

foundation for a number of American covenantal documents, which continue to govern the U.S. Civil religion's main function is to maintain separation of church and state while not denying the "political realm a religious dimension":

> Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the public sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion.[15]

In this manner the American civil religion also serves as theoretical tool to evaluate the relation of "the political society on the one hand and private religious organization on the other."[16] The existence of such a relationship is evident in the ubiquity in which religious notions appear in American public documents, political addresses, monuments, and so forth.

Consequently, foremost in the study of America's civil religion is the notion that Americans share a common religious tradition that transcends the principle of "separation of church and state" which in turn injects the public sphere with a religious dimension. Hence, religiosity is not limited exclusively to the "private sphere" as with Locke's civil government. Within the public sphere there actually exists a religious quality that both guides and directs, and serves as witnesses, a measure, and a judge, to the actions of the American political society, its people, leadership, and policies. Again, this religiosity is not entirely satisfied by the variant on Locke's system, constitutional-democracy, in that the object of faith lies beyond the chief legal document or constitution

---

[15] Ibid. 24.

[16] Ibid., 23

and dwells within a higher, transcendent measure—i.e., God—and is manifest in the American nation in the form of a covenant. While the God of the American civil religion may display some of the characteristics of the Enlightenment in its Unitarian and deist leanings, its covenantal quality along the lines of Ancient Israel and the Old Testament is more than evident:

> The God of the civil religion is not only rather "unitarian," he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love. Even though he is somewhat deist in cast, he is by no means simply a watchmaker God. He is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America. Here the analogy has much less to do with natural law than with ancient Israel; the equation of America with Israel in the idea of the "American Israel" is not infrequent.[17]

What is more, America's exodus from the Old World and its providential role in history is clearly explicated in it public beliefs, symbols and rituals. As Bellah adds, "Europe is Egypt; America, the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all the nations."[18]

And whereas past civil theologies either embodied a compact political-religious experience, such as the Roman public cult or the cosmological empire, or were contrived in order to secure "peace and concord," as with Hobbes's Leviathan and Rousseau's "minimum dogma," the American civil religion has a republican quality and developed in a rather organic fashion, first from the Calvinism of the Puritan colonists, and later by the infusion of the works of classical Greek and Roman theorists, held in such high esteem by America's Founding Fathers. Moreover, America's civil religion maintains a high degree of differentiation between religious and political authority, although this

---

[17] Ibid., 28.

[18] Ibid., 29.

differentiation is not complete, in that the public sphere remains animated by a religious quality. The central tenets of America's civil religion, while elaborate and well institutionalized, are sparse and abstract (what Bellah labels "marginal"); that is to say, its tenets are predicated simply on those "self-evident" truths highlighted in the Declaration of Independence. "The Declaration of Independence," writes Bellah, "points to the sovereignty of God over the collective political society itself when it refers in its opening lines to the 'laws of nature and nature's God' that stand above and judge the laws of men."[19] Yet these tenets neither overtly prescribe nor proscribe behavior, and only affirm that a well-ordered government and well-ordered institutions should embody them. Moreover, these tenets have no officially sanctioned support in the U.S. Constitution and the ensuing rational-legal order (what Bellah labels "abstract"). "Belief in the tenets of the civil religion," writes Bellah, "are legally incumbent on no one and there are no official interpreters of civil theology. Indeed, because of the formality I have just pointed out, there was very little civil theology to interpret."[20] Still, divine sanction hangs over the American political experiment, and if not spelled out explicitly, serves as a witness and measure for future generations of Americans bound the "laws of nature and nature's God."

Bellah's analysis of the American civil religion, then, displays the covenantal quality posited by Daniel Elazar. July 4, 1776 stands as the closest thing to an American "Sinai moment": after years in the wilderness of the New World and under the oppressive yoke of a tyrant king, a new covenant articulates into existence, with the sanctification of

---

[19] Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 11.

[20] Ibid., 12.

the American nation and the future hope for salvation for the world. This covenant is bound by the signers' oath: "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions … we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." Such was the significance of the American experiment.

Nevertheless, in convental systems, experiential atrophy appears to be the rule rather than the exception—and the American case is no exception. The inflow of liberal political, economic, and social principles during the nineteenth century undermined the classical republicanism that characterized the early founding period in the United States. The liberal social order promoted the rational pursuit of self-interest, and especially of interests anathema to classical republican values. As the state came under increasing scrutiny by liberal theorists, the market became seen to be the preeminent institution of society, governing all manner of social transactions. Knowledge, for instance, particularly individual knowledge, came to be uniquely valuable in itself. Accordingly, social order was seen to be dependent in great measure on both the aggregate of individual knowledge and the actions individuals take on such knowledge. Indeed, from the point of view of free-market liberals, the market itself is the ultimate human institution and the necessary condition for the best social order, in that the market brings together diverse interests, talents, and knowledge, and allows their free exchange. As the celebrated free-marketeer Friedrich von Hayek writes: "It might be said that civilization begins when the individual in the pursuit of his ends can make use of more knowledge than he himself has acquired and when he can transcend the boundaries of his ignorance

by profiting from knowledge he himself does not possess."[21] Accordingly, the market's efficiency precludes any intervention in the behaviors and mechanisms that cause it to function. Hayek argues against any form of regulation or redistribution. This liberal position, then, upholds the supreme value of individual liberty by opening up the possibility for the individual to discover a means of living that is productive and profitable, and which serves as an example for others to follow. As Hayek adds, "if the result of individual liberty did not demonstrate that some manners of living are more successful than others, much of the case for it would disappear."[22]

Hayek, moreover, advocates a decentralized form of morality, one that on its face would appear to be in line with organic metaphors of society, but which upon closer inspection reveals a radical break with the tradition established in America:

> Our argument will be that, though where the state must use coercion for other reasons, it should treat people all alike, the desire of making people more alike in their condition cannot be accepted in a free society as a justification for further and discriminatory coercion.[23]

Coercion, or even positive influence on the part of the state, cannot extend to character formation. Perhaps John Stuart Mill's maxim states the sentiment best: "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical

---

[21] F.A. Hayek. *The Constitution of Liberty,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 22; F.A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review* 5, Issue 4, 519-530; cf., Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 131: In regard to knowledge and information in society, Strauss argues in favor of a closed, "small society" or city (*polis*), in distinction to the model offered by Hayek, in that, "A city is a community commensurate with man's *natural* [emphasis mine] powers of firsthand or direct knowledge. It is a community which can be taken in in one view, or in which a mature man can find his own bearings through his own observation, without having to rely habitually on indirect knowledge in matters of vital importance. For direct knowledge of men can be safely replaced by indirect knowledge only so far as the individuals who make up the political multitude are uniform or 'mass men.'"

[22] Hayek. *The Constitution of Liberty,* 85.

[23] Ibid., 87.

or moral, is not sufficient warrant."[24] Hayek's argument follows in similar terms. A free society is one in which the individual is free to choose his or her own basis of being. Hence, Hayek's political community differs from classical republicanism in that the values of individuals are not taught to them by the state or the greater political community. Values, in Hayek's analysis, are formed by way of their utility in achieving material rewards—and emulated by others seeking similar rewards. [25] In Hayek's thinking, as with libertarianism in general, freedom is an end in itself, not some aspect of citizenship leading toward a higher public purpose. Freedom, in short, is to be practiced by the self-interested individual in isolation from any meaningful political community.

While the traditional American civil religion remained viable through the Civil War, its tenets would be under constant threat from liberalism's emphasis on the autonomous, self-interested individual. With the gradual triumph of liberalism during the nineteenth century, radical notions of America's purpose in world affairs, or that of Schlesinger's "America as destiny," began to fill the vacuum left by the loss of the traditional civil religion. While many contend that it is the policies of the political Left that led to the rise of moral relativism in the United States, it may be argued that, in fact, many on the political Right share equal responsibility. Hayek's philosophy, for instance, found a prominent place in the political discourse of American society—e.g., in the Reagan Administration's embrace of neo-classical economic theory and the "rugged" individualism of America's West—and contributed in its own way to the rending of America's social fabric. Hayek's self-interested individual, freed from all moral

---

[24] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in vol. 18 of *Essays on Politics and Society*, J.M. Robson ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963-1991), 33 vols., 223.

[25] Cf., Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.

constraints and any and all forms of external coercion, was thus open to pursue his or her own self-chosen way of life. The logical outcome can be seen in the explosion of lifestyle choices that the individual may participate in (many of which are based upon projecting an external image through one's patterns of consumption), the decline in associational life as individuals began to focus on smaller and smaller groups of like-minded individuals, or simply the isolation afforded by consumerism and mass entertainment.[26] And in the aesthetically orientated society, such as the one that currently characterizes the contemporary United States, it is neither "man is the measure", nor "God is the measure", but rather "the self" that is the "measure of all things."

Perhaps without a full understanding of their complicity in the moral relativism that seemed to be sapping the United States of its strength and hard-fought position in world affairs, American conservatives began the philosophic project to replace what they viewed as an all but defunct American civil religion. Part of this project is grounded in the notion that America represents a greater role in history than some may allow. Part lies in the moral outrages that led in great measure to the motivation of religious and social conservatives to take a stand and restore traditional American values, values that extended to all peoples, in all places, at all times.[27] Overall, destiny became conjoined with notions of America's covenantal status and special place and role in God's plan for mankind's salvation.

---

[26] See Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) for a full treatment of these themes.

[27] In a speech to fellow Evangelicals in Dallas in 1980, Rev. James Robison preached the following: "If the righteous, the pro-family, the moral, the biblical, the godly, the hard-working and the decent individuals in this country stay out of politics, who on this earth does that leave to make the policies under which you and I live and struggle to survive. I'm sick and tired of hearing about all of the radicals, and the perverts, and the liberals, and the leftists, and the Communists coming out of the closets. It's time for God's people to come out of the closet and the churches and change America. We must do it!"

AMERICA AS COVENANTAL NATION

Despite the experiences of continental Europe—and even the experiences in the British Isles—the historical record reveals a lack of serious social turmoil in regard to the American political-religious experience. American history is noted for its relative serenity in the face of competing sects, doctrines, and denominations. When conflict did arise to a significant level, it would come by way of the violation of America's sacred covenant with, in the words of the Declaration, the "Supreme Judge of the World." The Civil War, for instance, stands as a testament of America's broken covenant.[28] The great national conflict that pitted American against American in civil war was not simply a struggle over values; it was a struggle over the sanctity of the American nation. When Abraham Lincoln addressed the nation at the time of his Second Inaugural Address, he framed the Civil War in terms of an unfaithful nation, with the costs associated with the war as retribution and atonement for the violation of the sacred covenant that bound the American people to a higher purpose and measure:

> If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."[29]

---

[28] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 30-33.

[29] Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1865.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address also expressed within it such covenantal themes and themes of sacrifice and atonement, while his assassination carried with it overtones of sacrifice and the penitence for the entire nation.

As profound as these implications stand in the panoply of the America experience, the American covenant did not erupt at one epic point in history. Rather, it was the culmination of several generations of Western European immigrants socialized into the tenets, first of Calvinism, and later, the republicanism of the classical writers of the Greco-Roman tradition. The Declaration of Independence represents, in Voegelinian terms, the initial "eruption" of the American nation. It is the preliminary articulation of a distinct political society united by a mutual purpose, a shared moral vision and a common interest. As Daniel Elazar posits, the Declaration stands as the most concise and thorough statement of the fundamental American political philosophy.[30] It is the Declaration that pronounces the "ends" of the American government—while the Constitution outlines the "means" to achieve the ends. The Declaration delineates the self-evident truths, of which life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are the most pronounced and to which men are provisioned, in theory if not practice, an equal share. Moreover, God serves as both a Witness and Judge in the covenantal relationship, as the closing of the Declaration indicates:

> We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, … appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies … And for the support of this declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

[30] Daniel Elazar, *The American Constitutional Tradition,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

The Constitution, on the other hand, stands as the means to secure these truths by way of checks and balances, separation of powers, government by consent, the rule of law, federalism, pluralism, secularism (e.g., the "non-establishment clause"), and tolerance (e.g., the "free exercise clause"). The consensus on these fundamental "ends" and "means" constitute, as we have seen, the "American Creed" and resonates in the exhortations of American political leaders. [31]

Covenants are to be distinguished from other types of compacts, particularly contracts. Compacts indicate an agreement between separate parties and refer to the coming together of two or more separate entities in order to achieve a common purpose. The Mayflower Compact, for instance, notes the convening and combining of Separatists from England and Holland, and alludes to the covenantal nature of what would become the first written constitution in the Americas:

> Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually in the Presence of God and one of another, convenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid.

Whereas contracts represent expressions of private law, "interpreted as narrowly as possible so as to limit the obligation of the contracting parties to what is explicitly mandated by the contract itself," a covenant indicates an obligation beyond the letter of the law.[32] Covenants are constitutional or public in character, and as with ancient Israel

---

[31] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 21.

[32] Elazar, *The American Constitutional Tradition*, 90.

and the American colonists, proved important in the constitution/articulation of the political society.

As important as America's covenantal origins are to the life of the nation, Elazar draws attention to the change in the awareness of America's covenantal tradition. As Elazar argues: "Today the resonances have been lost because we have lost awareness of the covenantal tradition. Yet the tradition itself persists in more ways than we often recognize."[33] While an understanding of the covenantal origins may have become opaque in the minds of many Americans, these origins may still inform tangible aspects of American public policy.

Initially, the covenant served as an austere measure for the American nation, as witnessed in Lincoln's admonishments in his Second Inaugural Address. More recently, however, the covenant has come to be understood in terms of God's chosen nation with license to act within human affairs with a degree of impunity. Recovering the older tradition, if such an undertaking can be accomplished at all, requires an understanding of what led to its diminishing importance in the first place.

To a certain extent, positivist social science plays a role in change in awareness, in that its focus is on method (or means) and quantifiable behavior, as opposed to underlying values such as those concerning what constitutes the "good" society. Knowledge, particularly in the modern liberal state, is of a neutral quality, with objective value-free analysis constituting the bulk of valid knowledge. This is readily seen in the materialist orientation if not bias of contemporary pubic policy. Rational choice theory, public choice, and what Francis Fukuyama refers to as the "Wall Street Journal School of

[33] Ibid.

historical determinism" all limit public discourse to material factors in the identification of social problems and the formulation of public policy.[34] Cost-benefit analysis, gross domestic product, per capita income, and so forth, become the measures of understanding the health of the nation and its particular public policies. The political knowledge of the Founders, on the other hand, symbolized as "self-evident" and predicated on the speculation and theorization of classical philosophy, posits the possibility of true knowledge and the construction of a political society in which true knowledge can be embodied—particularly a good and just society. "Present-day positive social science," Elazar maintains, "tends to hold that such knowledge is impossible because goodness and justice are merely expressions of individual or group 'value' preference that are based not on objective reason, but on subjective passion and self-interests."[35] Hence, the tenets so crucial to republicanism, or what Schlesinger refers to as the "tradition," and enshrined in the Declaration's admonition concerning "decent respect to the opinions of mankind" concerning the "higher" ends of government (e.g., the public good, justice, and equality), lost ground to the legality of the liberal-constitutional state and utilitarian measures of "progress." Schlesinger adds that the young no longer study history, and that academia favors the ahistorical behavioral sciences to that of historical or normative analysis.

The end result of this disintegration of the older American self-understanding is that the American "destiny" tendency overwhelmed the American "experiment" tradition, ultimately steering Americans toward messianism. Even America's church's drifted from their role in engendering citizenship and socializing the young into a meaningful

[34] See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History?*, 6.

[35] Ibid., 95.

moral-political framework. Churches have grown significantly larger and have seen their doctrines shift to such notions of radical millennialism and a Prosperity Gospel.[36] The traditional American covenant, in this sense, gave way to an understanding of the exceptional nature of American political society. Such a conclusion points to the hubristic turn of the United States from a recognition of its fallibility toward American exceptionalism, a turn similar to Israel shirking off the theocracy of the Judges for a king and a greater, more autonomous position in the world—and with the apostasy, all the tragic consequences that would follow.

AMERICA: REPUBLIC OR LIBERAL CONSTITUTIONAL STATE?

Framing the analysis of the idea of an American civil religion is the question of competing paradigms concerning the nature of the American political regime. Is the American political regime a republic in the classical sense of the term? Or is it a modern liberal-constitutional state? Part of this problem can be explained in terms of the nature of Western political theorizing. The claim was made above that much that can be construed as early modern political philosophy was none other than the various attempts of political theorists to deal with a lack of a civil theology for the modernizing nation-states of Western Europe. While other attempts to deal with the social disruptions resulting from the conflict-laden relationship between religion and the politics focused on securing "peace and concord" (namely the construction of a minimum dogma, the rise of immanentist movements, Locke's civil government, and its variant constitutional-

[36] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 17. Chapter Five will explore these notions more fully.

democracy), the American solution to the religious-political problem reveals a unique development in the discord between these two symbolic claims to authority. The consequence of this development, however, is a persistent tension and skeptical unclarity concerning the role of religion in politics or in relation to the state, and vice versa.

In the United States, the tension has been exasperated by a general uncertainty as to the nature of the American political system and by the accretion and the increasing saliency of the liberal ideology within and over the republican political tradition. Accordingly, civil religion has been interpreted quite differently in regard to these two political systems, and in the case of the liberal state, there is doubt whether it is needed or if it even exists at all. Hence, in order to understand the structure and function of the American civil religion, what is needed is a better understanding of the American political regime and the definitive shift from classical republicanism of the Founding period, to the legalistic enterprise the characterizes the framing and adoption of the United States Constitution and the liberal state that would eventually emerged from this document.

"The basic unclarity," according to sociologist Robert Bellah, "rests on whether we are a republic in recognizable relation to the republics of classical and modern times and dependent on that inner spirit of republican character and mores that makes for republican citizenship or whether we are a liberal constitutional regime governed through artificial contrivance and the balancing of conflicting interests."[37] The general trend within the American political experience is toward accommodating both traditions, a deeply complicating state of affairs, in that both traditions seem to be mutual exclusive

[37] Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1980), 8; Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 101-103.

and contradictory of one another. The republican tradition relies on an active political community endowed with a distinct purpose and a core set of values, roughly interpreted as a definitive "way of life." Moreover, republics symbolize, to some degree, the ultimate order of existence. In Voegelinian terms, the well-ordered republic can be conceived as a *microcosmos*—that is, the embodiment of cosmic order or transcendent truth. Notable examples include, Plato's "just" society—i.e., cultivating "just" citizens (like the archetype Socrates); Aristotle and the *summum bonum*—that is, the cultivation of the "highest good" in the citizens of the republic; Rome and the notion that the Roman Republic represented the highest stage of human existence and the *paterfamilias* as the exemplar of Roman virtue; the Puritans and the establishment of Christian republic based on God's infallible word; and the American Founding Fathers espousing of "self-evident truths" and the establishment of a civil government embodying these truths. In addition to the republic as a *microcosmos*, there is also Plato's anthropological principle, or the idea of the political community as a *macroanthropos* expressed most succinctly in the phrase "the polis as man written large." In short, it is a theory of man in society.

A political regime, then, from the point of view of republican theorists (from Aristotle, to Machiavelli, to Montesquieu), "is an expression of the total way of life of a people."[38] In this sense, the political community will reflect the sum character of the citizens comprising it. Thus if the character of a political community reflects that of the Sophist, as in Socrates' Athens, then one may say that the polis is the Sophist written large.[39] (One may conjecture that today the American political community is the

[38] Ibid., 9.

[39] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 137.

bureaucrat or consumer written large.) What stands out in this analysis, is that political order and change within that order, can be interpreted in terms of "corresponding changes in the socially predominate human types."[40] Republics, then, are dependent on citizens embodying republican principles—and there is no guarantee that these principles will remain viable within the political community, and indeed, history reveals that they will not. Hence, a republic may devolve into oligarchy if the animating spirit favors and tends to promote the rule of a self-selecting elite; or even worse, it may devolve into despotism if fear becomes the animating spirit, all the while retaining the *procedures* of a liberal, constitutional democracy. Consequently, as our analysis has indicated, substance trumps procedure, and existential representation tells us a great deal more of the political society than representation in the elemental sense. What is more, freedom operates in a differing sense in a republic than in a liberal-constitutional state. Freedom in the republican tradition is a "positive" value, in that it "asserts the worth and dignity of political equality and popular government."[41]

The historical record reveals that republics as viable systems of government are generally short-lived and tumultuous. The notable republics of the classical period all succumbed to corruption and decadence from within, thereby leaving the republic open to threats from without. [42] Historian Arthur Schlesinger renders this idea more clearly when he refers the inevitable dissolution of the republic in terms of Pocock's "Machiavellian moment," or that moment in time when vice overwhelms civic virtue, and the republic

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 12.

[42] Ibid.,; hence, if it is to survive, the republic must, in the words of Bellah, "elicit the ethical commitment of its citizens." The mortality of republics, then, is the rule and not the exception.

confronts its own mortality—sliding into an existential struggle to redefine its purpose and values.[43] Thus, in order for a republic to survive the vicissitudes of time and the vagaries of human nature, a positive role is conferred on the institutions of the state. The state's role is to root out corruption and encourage virtue. As Bellah writes: "The republican state therefore has an ethical, educational, and even spiritual role, and it will survive only as long as it reproduces republican citizens."[44]

In the American political experience, liberal-constitutionalism is the newer form of political organization, implemented and refined in the framing and ratification of the United States Constitution and modified with the rise, maturing, and, as some may say, with the decline of classical liberalism. The liberal ideology developed a new idea concerning political life and a new view of the nature and role of the state, a development that arose "partly in response to a newly emerging economic order."[45] The animating sprit behind the liberal perspective is that a "good society" can result by simply harnessing human *self-interests* (e.g., human passions) by way of properly organized institutions. Freedom in the liberal state is conceived largely in the "negative" sense, in that the state itself should not either embody or promote any particular "way of life." Moreover, a limited role is ascribed for the state (e.g., a caretaker or night-watchman state), in that, the state should do little more than to "maintain public order and allow the economic market mechanisms and the free market in ideas to produce wealth and

---

[43] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles in American History*, 9; see also J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton , 1975).

[44] Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 9.

[45] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America*, 12.

wisdom."[46] The liberal state, in a word, corresponds to Locke's "constitutional-democracy" and has taken on an aura of finality in American political consciousness. Locke's civil government posits the separation of a *natural* public sphere, which alone constitutes the "political," from a private sphere containing the life of reason and spirit (or religion)—the state is a neutral legal-entity, refereeing conflicting passions and providing the peace and security necessary so that individuals can be free to pursue their self-interests with minimal constraints. "Freedom," then, becomes the catchword of the liberal social order, and like prayers to heaven, there is no end to the supplications and odes to freedom—though the essence of freedom may be but little understood.

Whereas a republican state is afforded the power to educate and socialize its citizens into the principles, purposes, and values of the republic, the liberal state can make no such claims on the hearts and minds of its citizens; their values and purposes are as differentiated as their individual self-interests and passions. The liberal state is, or rather, claims to be, a neutral, value free institution, the chief legal institution in a highly institutionalized, legalistic social order. Bellah reminds us that not only are these two political systems different, "they are profoundly antithetical."[47] For republican theorists, exclusive concern for one's own self-interests is the very definition of corruption. And as Bellah adds,

> The tendency to emphasize the private, particularly the economic side of life in the liberal, undermines the public participation essential to a republic. The wealth the liberal state generates is fatal to the basic political equality of a republic.

---

[46] Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 9-10.

[47] Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion,* 10.

Whereas civil religion is essential to the health and vitality of the republic, civil religion is of dubious value for the liberal state. Moreover, it is the vestiges of the republican tradition that seems the most vulnerable to institutional decay, in view of the fact that the self-interest of the liberal system tends to undermine the community orientation vital to the success of a republic, while the wealth creation and the accumulation of private possessions, ascribed as one of the strengths of the liberal system, fosters corruption in varying degrees and forms.

By the late twentieth century, conservatives, out of a sense of impending disaster confronting the American nation, would urge a revival of American traditions. But what exactly constitutes "conservativism" in the United States? And if more than one faction can be discerned within American conservativism, what type of alliances or coalitions have developed in response to identified social problems—problems which in turn are reflected in the shaping of the public agenda and the formulation of public policy? The answers to these questions are essential in understanding how one coalition of American conservatives, the neoconservatives and the Religious Right, sought to arrest the decline of American society by the elevation of Protestant Christianity as a civil theology for the American nation. This project resulted in consequences that these conservatives either did not anticipate (as with the neoconservatives) or simply brushed off with the justification the United States and the America's "faithful" were earnestly performing God's will here on earth. Hence it is necessary to explore conservativism and its various manifestations and its impact on American political society.

CHAPTER FOUR

MODERN CONSERVATISM AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIAL ORDER

> In extreme situations there may be conflicts between what the self-preservation of society requires and the requirements of commutative and distributive justice. In such situations, and only in such situations, the public safety is the highest law.
>
> —Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*

Conservativism in the United States is a theory, or rather, an approach to political questions, in which the overriding interest is, ostensibly, to maintain the given status quo. American political society as a whole has displayed many of the essential elements of conservativism throughout its history. Samuel P. Huntington, for instance, lays out the primary creed of traditional conservative thought in the following way:

> The characteristic elements of conservative thought—the "divine tactic" in history; prescription and tradition; the dislike of abstraction and metaphysics; the distrust of individual reason; the organic conception of society; the stress on the evil of man; the acceptance of social differentiation—all serve the overriding purpose of justifying the established order. The essence of conservativism is the rationalization of existing institutions in terms of history, God, nature and man.[1]

Moreover, Huntington's analysis follows that of Alexis de Tocqueville's observations over a hundred years earlier. Tocqueville's nineteenth-century analysis of the American people displays many of these qualities, particularly the role of Providence in American

---

[1] Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservativism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review* 51 (June 1957), 457;

social narratives, an organic conception of society, and the acceptance of social differentiation. Notwithstanding such affinities with traditional conservative thought, however, conservativism in the United States has come to mean different things to different people. Leo Strauss, for example, reveals the complex and tortuous relationship between liberalism and conservativism in contemporary American political experience:

> The difficulty in defining the difference between liberalism and conservativism with the necessary universality is particularly great in the United States, since this country came into being through a revolution. … The opposition between conservativism and liberalism had a clear meaning at the time … Then and there the conservatives stood for "throne and alter," and the liberals stood for popular sovereignty and the strictly nonpublic (private) character of religion. Yet conservativism in this sense is no longer politically important. The conservativism of our age is identical with what originally was liberalism, more or less modified by changes in the direction of present-day liberalism.[2]

In a very real sense, then, it can be argued that the contemporary expression of conservativism in the United States is none other than a general expression of classical liberal principles, particularly that of the primary role of the market in the allocation of material wants as the dominant means to achieve desirable "ends"—including, by extension, the role of pluralist theory in explaining American electoral politics and public policy-making in terms of bargaining and compromise between competing factions or interests. It is these "ends," then, that become the focus of contention; whether these ends are considered in terms of the maximization, preservation, or dissemination of universal rights held by the individual, the maximization of utility, and traditional social values. If this analysis is correct, then it is quite plausible to conclude that the term "liberal" quite naturally generates considerable confusion, especially at the popular level. Consequently, it is important to distinguish between political and economic liberalism, in

[2] Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, ix.

that much of the confusion —but certainly not all—concerning the nature of conservativism can be understood in relation to these two concepts.

Political liberalism, we have seen, is an ideology that stresses individual rights, liberty, and relative equality among individuals—an equality of opportunity if not results. (Here conservativism stands as an ideological alternative to "liberalism"; for example, in conservativism's qualification of individual liberty in relation to more traditional modes of social organization and in opposition to liberalism's measures to promote equality.) Economic liberalism, on the other hand, refers to a set of economic policies that affirm an obligation to financial and trade liberalization and the free market system as a whole. Here the free market and the autonomous, utility-maximizing individual are touted as the most effective means to achieve the optimum allocation of resources and, by extension, the maximization of individual liberty by way of freeing entrepreneurial propensities, consumer choice, and so forth. Economic liberalism's theoretical opposite is the command economy or statism. Statism can be defined as the concentration of economic controls and planning in the hands of a highly centralized government; it is the principle or policy of giving to the state extensive control over the social, economic, and political spheres of society at the expense of individual liberty.[3] Economic liberals from Adam Smith to Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, in varying degrees, stood opposed to statist principles. In their view, government, even when acting with the best intentions, will only hamper the efficiency maximization qualities of the market. Conservatives in the United States have largely has embraced liberal economic theories aimed at preserving the principles of free markets along with certain elements of individualism

[3] See, Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 25-34.

(i.e., those elements generally pertaining to the market) all the while developing a social agenda aimed at ameliorating deteriorating conditions concerning specific social indicators—e.g., family values, the sanctity of marriage, the rights of the unborn, and so forth.

In order to gain a better understanding of the project to restore the older, "traditional" American civil religion it is thus necessary to briefly survey some key aspects of modern conservative thought, its roots and its contemporary manifestations. Hence, it is necessary to move beyond the popular liberal/conservative dichotomy toward a more fundamental understanding of the animating spirit that illuminates the perceived source of social order. Additionally, it essential to further explore the conception of "modernity," particularly the crisis of modernity and the reaction it engendered by conservative thinkers and political commentators in the United States. Modernity, perhaps more than any other phenomenon, is the root source of so much of the difficulties concerning contemporary political discourse, both at the domestic level and at the international level. Finally, in order to understand the neoconservative agenda it is also necessary to understand the transformation of classical political philosophy into a modern science of man as part of the modern project and the crisis this project engendered.

"OLD SCHOOL" CONSERVATIVISM

Conservativism as an encompassing political doctrine is most readily understood in terms of Edmund Burke's reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and his attempt to shore up social order in the face of profound, if not radical, change within eighteenth-century European societies. This understanding of change translates

readily for conservatives in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries, in that affirmative efforts at social leveling or radical social change are seen as throwbacks to past attempts of social engineering, attempts that, in their own way, had the unintentional consequences of significant social disorder and global chaos. Perhaps Russell Kirk explained it best when he wrote: "A world that damns tradition, exalts equality, and welcomes change; a world that has clutched at Rousseau … and demanded prophets more radical; a world smudged by industrialism, standardized by the masses, consolidated by government; a world crippled by war, trembling between the colossi of East and West, and peering over a smashed barricade into the gulf of dissolution: this, our era, is the society Burke foretold."[4] Conservativism, in this sense, then, refers to the approach to perennial political and social questions facing humans, the emphasis of which is empirical as opposed to purely rational, is skeptical concerning human capabilities as opposed to overtly progressive or meliorative, and in certain circumstances, tends to favor the status quo or piecemeal change over that of radical, revolutionary institutional and social transformation. Hence, experience, tradition and custom play a leading role in conservative thought, not the least of which is the preservation of tried and true institutions that have stood the test of time and, in their own way, secured peace and concord among the members of society. "Prescription," in a word, reveals the Burkean approach to political matters. Prescription is not concerned with such abstract concepts such as the "Rights of Man," but rather, in regard to concepts as "rights," such concepts

[4] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 4.

are defensible insofar as they are considered time-honored privileges or prerogatives, guaranteed by "immemorial usage."[5]

Conservatives, as commonly understood, differ in their assessment on issues such as of freedom, equality, religion, the market, and so forth. Nevertheless, they do share a consensus on human nature, namely, a darker, negative outlook on human nature and human capabilities. There is so to speak, no "natural goodness" of man or a "natural harmony of interests" as with classical liberal thought. Human beings display a pronounced egoism in their relations with one another and this egoism extends from the individual to the group in the form of prejudice. But this prejudice is not to be construed as mere bigotry, as is the wont today. As Kirk explains, "prejudice is prejudgment, the answer with which intuition and ancestral consensus of opinion supply a man when he lacks either time or knowledge to arrive at a decision predicated upon pure reason."[6] To the extent that humans can live in relative peace and harmony with one another, the existence of institutions embodying the time-honored wisdom of several generations and spread out over numerous individual minds have been successfully incorporated into human society. "Ignore this enormous bulk of racial knowledge, or tinker impudently with it," says Kirk, "and man is left awfully afloat in a sea of emotions and ambitions, with only the scanty stock of formal learning and the puny resource of individual reason

---

[5]Ibid., 23-47; In addition to Burke, notable conservative thinkers include, Michael Oakeshott, William F. Buckley, libertarians such as Robert Nozick, and though he may have shunned the title, Fredrick Hayek. Both Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin have been associated with conservative thinking; however, these theorists present difficulties with such a label, with Voegelin in particular appearing to disapprove of the label. Strauss, moreover, would later be associated as an intellectual sage of the neoconservative movement, a movement not entirely in league with mainstream conservative thinking.

[6] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 38.

to sustain him."[7] Moreover, for the traditional conservative, deliberate, rational contrivances of institutions, or even such doctrines such as meliorism, are more likely to undermine the existing social order rather than improve upon it.

Such time-honored empirical institutions correspond to what Edmund Burke labels the "decent drapery of life." Speaking on the deleterious effects of the Enlightenment and its riotous outcome, the French Revolution, Burke opines:

> But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.[8]

Hence, tradition and the institutions that give rise to tradition, are for the conservative, not to be trifled with. While institutions might not display the outward manifestations of deliberate design, they do, nevertheless, embody the "accidental" wisdom of social order, actualized not in a moment of rational agreement, but rather, as the embodiment of the wisdom of countless minds, over generations of human lives, and indeed, erupting in a seemingly arational fashion.

Institutions for conservatives, then, develop in a somewhat evolutionary manner, over generations, picking up wisdom that proves beneficial and wholesome to society, and as with the concept of prescription, discarding those behaviors that no longer prove conducive to social harmony. These institutions can be seen to serve two vital functions.

---

[7] Ibid.

[8] Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France", 133.

First, they serve to link younger generations to the past, thereby providing and reinforcing a sense of identity and place. This sense of identity and place so much a part of the socialization process is exceedingly important to social stability, in that it internalizes customary norms of behavior thereby lending a sense of permanent legitimacy in the face of what can often be viewed as wholesale technological, social, and ecological change. Secondly, institutional "reform" is inherent in such a conception of evolutionary change—rather than wholesale or revolutionary change, institutions undergo a process of piecemeal change, acting in response (as opposed to reacting) to changes in the social and physical environment. The conservative is not opposed to reform per say, but rather operates with the understanding that institutional change should be cautious, always with an eye to the experiences of the past. "To be a conservative," writes Michael Oakeshott, "is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss."[9] Consequently, the trial and error institutional development so prized by conservatives proceeds without any deliberate, rational design, and often in ways that confound those that study them.

This notion of evolutionary institutional change extends to the concept of liberty itself. In this sense, liberty is not the deliberate creation of the state, nor is it simply a "natural right" to be gleaned from nature and applied to political society; rather, liberty is the result of trial and error experience, the result of successful institutional development,

---

[9] Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *The Portable Conservative Reader*, Russell Kirk ed, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 569; As Oakeshott adds: "The rationalist is like a shopkeeper who, having bought an estate, thinks that a correspondence course in estate management will give him all the knowledge necessary to control it and its tenantry and the knowledge which belongs to a man who been has educated from his earliest years in the responsibilities and duties of landowner is not (where it goes beyond technique) knowledge at all, but nescience."

indicative of the benefits of the free exchange of goods, ideas, and knowledge itself. Hayek, while himself disapproving of the label "conservative" as applied to himself,[10] nevertheless makes a distinction of the benefits of what can be described as an "organic" form of liberty from that of a contrived, rationalized liberty—a key distinction in conservative political thinking. "We have to the present day," says Hayek, "two different traditions in the theory of liberty: one empirical and unsystematic, the other speculative and rationalistic—the first based on an interpretation of traditions and institutions which had grown up and were imperfectly understood, the second aiming at the construction of a utopia, which has been tried, but never successfully."[11] Conservative thought, then, distinguishes between what is referred to as the Galician tradition of liberty, or the conception of liberty that developed in continental Europe and its obsession with rationalism in all aspects of human social life, and an Anglo tradition of liberty based as it were, on evolutionary institutional development. Accordingly, freedom in the Anglo tradition, is the unintentional outgrowth of successful institutional development, a secondary development that in turn proved beneficial for future institutional outgrowth, wealth creation, innovation, and so on.

Yet while the free flow of information in a market-like environment is essential to institutional adaptation, for the conservative, markets and morality do not exists in isolation from one another; quite the contrary. Conservative thought is predicated on a

---

[10] F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 397-411; Hayek, for instance, states: "The more I learn about the evolution of ideas, the more I have become aware that I am simply an unrepentant Old Whig …It is the doctrine which is at the basis of common the common tradition of the Anglo-Saxon countries. …It is the doctrine on which the American system of government is based. In its pure form it is represented in the United States, not by the radicalism of Jefferson, nor by the conservativism of Hamilton or even of John Adams, but by the ideas of James Madison, the 'father of the Constitution'" (p. 409).

[11] Ibid., 54.

functioning moral order in order for society to operate smoothly. Whereas reform liberalism, at least in its later incarnations, assigned great care to the regulation of markets while allowing relatively free reign in one's "lifestyle choice"; and whereas, libertarianism allows relatively free reign over both markets and lifestyle choices; conservative thought realizes that markets rely on an antecedent moral and ethical framework in order for markets to operate effectively and efficiently. This reveals a social order that is not essentially laissez-faire: "it was not some sort of magic but the evolution of 'well constructed institutions' where the 'rules and principles of contending interests and compromised advantages' would be reconciled, that successfully channeled individual efforts to socially beneficial aims."[12] The "rule of law" figures heavily in this equation, particularly, the Anglo-American common law system based on *stare decisis*, or judicial precedent. Hence state and market do not operate independently, but rather are bound by a common ethic, that is, the Protestant Ethic and its constraining measures on detrimental behaviors.

Traditional, "Burkean" conservativism posits the existence of a spontaneous arising social order, built on the experience of countless minds over successive generations, and contains a delicate symmetry that often seems to belie its origins, structure, and functions. Self-regulation is the goal, the market and pluralism are means, and this is achieved namely by way of channeling individual self-interests to the public good and with law as the way of settling disputes over interpretation. Consequently, civilization is the successful embodiment of these principles. However, traditional conservativism was not entirely enamored by the market as with Hayek and libertarians.

[12] Ibid., 60; cf., Edmund Burke, "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," Works, VII, 398.

Burke, for instance, laments the influence of the market mentality and the effect it has on social order (particularly the tension between town and country):

> The truly melancholy part of the policy of systematically making a nation of gamesters is this; that tho' all are forced to play, few can understand the game; and fewer still are in a condition to avail themselves of the knowledge. The many must be the dupes of the few who conduct the machine of these speculations. What effect it must have on the country-people is visible. The townsman can calculate from day to day: not so the inhabitant of the country. When the peasant first brings his corn to market, the magistrate in the town obliges him to take the assign at par; when he goes to the shop with this money, he finds it seven per cent. the worse for crossing the way. This market he will not readily resort to again. The townspeople will be inflamed! they will force the country-people to bring their corn. Resistance will begin, and the murders of Paris and St. Dennis may be renewed through all France.[13]

As with all other things, prudence requires a careful balance between traditional forms of allocation, with the freedom the market brought to society constrained by tradition, as well as political and ecclesiastical authority—that is, civil society proper. Part of the role of civil society involves some notion of a natural end for mankind reminiscent of classical political philosophy.[14] Conservative thought, then, is based on disciplined reason, established tradition, with freedom derivative and a source of social stability all aimed at a natural end of a higher purpose for mankind.

---

[13] Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," 229.

[14] Ibid., 15; As Francis Canavan adds in the introduction to "Reflections": "The ultimate premises of Burke's political thought are provided by the metaphysics of a created universe. They assume the superiority of reason or intellect to will in both God and man. Part of this universe is the natural moral order based on the nature of man as created by God. Man's nature is oriented by creation toward ends that may be globally described as its natural perfection. Since civil society is necessary to the attainment of that perfection, it too is natural and willed by God. The authority of the state derives from the rational and moral ends that it is intended by *nature* to serve [emphasis mine]. Consent plays a role in the formation of the state and the conferral of its authority on government, since both involve human acts of choice. But the obligation to form a civil society is prior to consent, and, for those born under a constitution, consent to the constitution is commanded by the previous obligation to obey a government that is adequately serving the natural goals of society. Rights also play a part in Burke's political theory. But the basic political right is the right to be governed well, not the right to govern oneself. In Burke's thought, purpose and obligations are more fundamental than rights and consent" (p.15).

STRAUSSIAN POLITICAL THINKING

Conservativism can be understood as a reaction to changes in the status quo, this much is sure. How to maintain the status quo—or which piecemeal adjustments are acceptable—is not so certain. A primary target for conservative thinkers has been the modern political project to establish a moral, social, and political order based on human reason and to diminish the role of revealed religion, tradition, and customary social arrangements, or any other social conventions not based on unequivocal rationality. For Leo Strauss, such a project was not simply a diversion from venerable traditions, but rather, revealed a radical and significant break by modern thinkers from classical political philosophy. A nascent theorist in this modern project was Machiavelli who, in a rather radical pragmatism, attempted to craft a true science of politics as opposed to political philosophy. Indeed, Machiavelli would receive a significant amount of attention from Strauss, primarily due to his influence on later modern thinkers and, more specifically, for the crisis his thinking would engender. Writing on the American political experience, for instance, Strauss argues that the United States was the only country "founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles."[15] Hence, somewhere in the articulation of American political society, then, Americans were able, in Strauss's view, to maintain a piece of the past; that is, Americans were able to embody the vestiges of classical political philosophy and thereby not experience the full crisis of modernity. And while Machiavelli initiated the advent of modernity (or represented a bridge between medieval and modern thinking), the modern project came to full form in the works of Thomas

[15] Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 13.

Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacque Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and finally, in the "radical historist," Martin Heidegger.

"Modernity" for Strauss had a very particular meaning. Properly understood, modernity represents a radical and conscious break with classical thinking, a "project" so to speak, in which the end result manifested itself in the Western world's drift into relativistic, historically determined value systems, and with the liberal state charged with the impossible task of maintaining neutrality in what can be described as an ever-changing value-marketplace—or at least, a value-marketplace in which such values are historically determined. In this sense, Strauss shares with other conservatives a dissatisfaction with radical change. And whereas conservative dissatisfaction with radical change is not a sentiment difficult to ascertain (political writings from classical political thinking to the present display this sentiment), just what exactly can be utilized to establish a ground for the social order is not so easy to determine. Indeed, this seems to be one of the great political questions.

For Strauss, a key issue inevitably involves the distinction between classical and modern natural right—and correspondingly, between classical and modern formulations of natural law. In regard to the classical formulations, natural law embodies a specific content of ethical principles, subject to the enforcement by way of encouragement and discouragement, as with Aristotle, or by command and proscription, as with St. Thomas.[16] This corresponds to the notion of the well-ordered soul and what constitutes

[16] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 146-164; cf., S.B. Drury, "Leo Strauss's Classical Natural Right Teaching," *Political Theory* 3, 310, in which Drury argues: "Natural law is not encumbered with if's and but's: Aquinas considers moral principles to have a compulsory character that they did not have for Aristotle. They did not just encourage and discourage, they command and forbid."

the "good life" (i.e., summum bonum) or the life according to nature, and natural law its specific prescriptions:

> The good life is the life that is in accordance with the natural order of man's being, the life that flows from a well-ordered or healthy soul. The good life simply, is the life in which the requirements of man's natural inclinations are fulfilled in the proper order to the highest possible degree, the life of a man in whose soul nothing lies waste. The good life is the perfection of man's nature. It is the life according to nature. One may therefore call the rules circumscribing the general character of the good life "the natural law."[17]

Hence, natural law embodies a very definitive and objective measure, that is, the "good life" predicated upon the natural order, the end of which is the perfection of man's nature.

Classical natural right involves at least four key elements: (1) there is a best political order, an order conducive to man's perfection; (2) man can only reach perfection in civil society, a society in which civil duties precede civil rights—hence, civil society is prior to the individual; (3) chance is significant for the establishment of such an order—or at least plays a role in the success of such an undertaking; and (4) nature serves as the standard for both the individual and the community:

> The best regime, as the classics understand it, is not only the most desirable; it is also meant to be feasible or possible … It is both desirable and possible because it is according to nature. Since it is according to nature, no miraculous or nonmiraculous change in human nature is required for its actualization … Yet while the best regime is possible, its actualization is by no means necessary. Its actualization is very difficult, hence improbable … For man does not control the conditions under which it could become actual. Its actualization depends on chance.[18]

Natural right could also quite easily be construed to mean the natural right of one group to rule over others, say philosopher-kings: "The best regime is that in which the best men

---

[17] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 127; cf., Crèvecoeur's "American Character" (Letter III), and the notion that Americans live a life closer to nature—or life as it is meant to be lived.

[18] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 138-139; see also ibid. 182ff.

habitually rule, or aristocracy."[19] And as we have seen, the best are necessarily the "wise." However, with natural right comes corresponding natural duties, specifically to know one's function and place within society and to perform such a function well.[20] Classical natural right, then, is not concerned with social convention—or rather, is decidedly concerned with overcoming the constraints of social convention toward a natural understanding of man and society. Those endowed by nature with the inclination, and who, in addition, have recognized the situation as such, are endowed by nature with the right to overcome convention and to act accordingly. Moreover, teleology forms the backdrop for social order, namely in the full actualization of human potential or the perfection of man's nature.

Modern natural right, on the other hand, thinks in terms of self-preservation rather than perfection, social contract rather than personal virtue, and emphasizes the actualization of wisdom as opposed to the quest for wisdom. That is, in order to preserve one's life and well-being, individuals enter a social contract or compact of sorts, thus constructing civil society and the mechanisms of the state in order to tame human nature rather than perfect it. In this sense, man exists prior to civil society (i.e., in the "state of nature") and not vice versa. Hence, modern natural right reintroduces the concept of nature in political theorizing, however, nature and human nature, in particular, is now considered in terms of the "rights of man," rights predicated, as it were, on materialistic and somewhat mechanistic physical drives. Hobbes, in Strauss's view, redefines political philosophy in both naturalistic and mechanistic terms, along with a new epistemology for

---

[19] Ibid., 140.

[20] Ibid., 147-148.

a new conception of the world—or rather, Hobbes recognized "the mere fact that the only certain knowledge which was available is not concerned with ends but 'consists in comparing figures and motion only' [creating] a prejudice against any teleological view or prejudice in favor of a mechanistic view."[21]

Locke, likewise, utilizes the concept of nature to justify his social theories, couched in terms of the law of nature and natural reason.[22] Hence, in Strauss's analysis, Locke "subverts" natural right from a teleological orientation to simply include the notion of the unlimited acquisition as "just"[23] and, as with Hobbes, directs attention toward man's fundamental drives—as opposed to man's natural "end." Perhaps more important is that in Strauss's view modern natural right is concerned with rights while denying corresponding duties:

> The desire for happiness and the pursuit of happiness have the character of an absolute right, of a natural right. There is, then, an innate natural right, while there is no innate natural duty. [24]

These desires are universal and unceasingly effective in shaping individual behavior.[25] The individual, then, the salient unit in liberal political theory, becomes free to pursue his or her own self-interest within a minimum framework of law and the unlimited acquisition of wealth becomes morally justifiable.

---

[21] Ibid., 171; see also ibid 182; cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. xi.

[22] See p. 24 above.

[23] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 226.

[24] Ibid., 226-227.

[25] Ibid., 226.

The distinction between classical and modern natural right opens a window into Straussian thought. For Strauss, the issue is not so much a "literary renaissance" as it is a realization and an appreciation of past accomplishments of the ancient Greeks:

> We cannot reasonably expect that a fresh understanding of the classical philosophy will supply us with the recipes for today's use. For the relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics, a kind of society to which the classical principles as stated and elaborated by the classics are not immediately applicable. Only we living today can find a solution to the problems of today. But an adequate understanding of the principles as elaborated by the classics may be an indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of the present-day society in its peculiar character.[26]

Nature, the measure incorporated by ancient Greek thinkers, constitutes and continues to provide the fundamental model for social and political organization.

What is important for our purposes is not so much the validity of classical natural right over its modern variant, or the philosophical propositions concerning the ethical ground of society. Rather, it is Strauss's emphasis on the role of *nature* and the implications that this mode of thinking has had on conservative thinkers. Such an emphasis involves a general examination of "what is right by nature" and how can society be ordered with this in mind. While there is considerable latitude in the interpretation of what is right by nature, such an examination extends to the truth of society itself. As we have seen, Strauss emphasizes the disproportion between the intransigent search for truth and the requirements of society.[27] Strauss's renowned focus on the esoteric writing styles of revered political theorist draws attention to this disproportion. As one scholar writes: "When reflecting on the esoteric writing style of

---

[26] Leo Strauss, *City and Man*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 11; cf., Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 89 and p. 49 above.

[27] See Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon's Hiero's;* see also p. 97-98 above.

Plato, instead of focusing on the confrontation between philosophy and revealed religion, Strauss found a tension between open philosophical inquiry and the needs of a closed political community."[28] Hence, "truth" can be considered a rather complicated, value-laden and politically charged affair; moreover, truth philosophically understood—that is philosophy as the quest of "love of wisdom"—may not be in accord with truth socially understood.

With this disproportion in mind, it is easier to understand how and why Strauss's influence has been especially notable on one group of American political and social pundits, the *neoconservatives*. Notable neoconservatives have displayed a seemingly equivocal attitude towards the securing of the Constitution's "Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity," on the one hand, and the securing of "peace and concord," on the other. Moreover, in regard to the liberal-capitalist system, there seems to be ambiguity in the eminence and stature of that system itself as opposed to say, an oligarchic structure. While raising numerous cheers to capitalism and its attendant liberal state, there remains a modicum of hesitancy by Straussians and neoconservatives in regard to this system. This hesitancy is displayed in the understanding that while the liberal system is pocked with the sores of human fallibility, it is, nevertheless, the most expedient alternative to contending modes of social organization. There exists then in this attitude Machiavelli's gulf between how one should live and how one actually does live—and that "a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns

---

[28] Gregory Bruce Smith, "Leo Strauss and the Straussians: An Anti-Democratic Cult?" *Political Science and Politics* 30, 183.

the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation."[29] Hence, within neoconservative thought, "organic truth," or the truth necessary for the functioning of society and which supports the continued existence of society through the securing of "peace and concord," can be juxtaposed with a higher, transcendent, truth.

Elitism for the moment aside, Strauss postulates that the liberal state, with its attendant capitalistic, free-market orientation, while not the ideal of social organization, is the most expedient of all alternative forms of social organization.[30] Caveats are in order, however. Much as Machiavelli lowered the sights on political philosophy to that of a pragmatic practice, liberalism lowered the expectations concerning the "good" society by extending the *possibility* of happiness to all. The classical political tradition of the virtues was, no doubt, an austere tradition in which the attainment of one's nature could not plausibly be extended to all members of society—nature itself dictated otherwise. Liberalism, on the other hand, steeped as it was in the thought of Machiavelli and later in the Enlightenment, held out the promise that all individuals could potentially benefit from the sophistication of social living. Nevertheless, liberalism too revealed a dark side, a side not easily amenable by the tenets of liberal thinking. Indeed, the very success of the liberal doctrine tended to sink Western liberal societies deeper into quagmire—or Strauss's "crisis of modernity."[31] As liberalism spread throughout the nation-states of Western Europe and the English speaking societies, so too did the modern malaise: toleration and unfettered individual liberty led to moral relativism; progress led to social, ecological, and spiritual decline; technological advances were accompanied by an

---

[29] See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* ch. 15.

[30] See, Smith, Leo Strauss and the Straussians," 180 and 186.

[31] See pp. 29-40 above.

increasing incapacity to find the ethical ground to use such advances wisely; individual sovereignty led to individual isolation; and so forth.

Strauss sought a way out of this dilemma of freedom versus order. Classical political philosophy and its emphasis on what is right by nature provided a "recipe," or rather, a prescription, for contemporary ills, while the natural political society, the *polis*, provided the context for contemporary political theorizing. In this context, the full actualization or perfection of the human individual is possible only in the confines of a closed society, in which justice in secured and freedom takes on a positive subtext and compulsion regarding certain behaviors a primary role of the state. Restraint on individual freedom, according to Strauss, is not necessarily bad in itself; indeed, restraint on certain types of individual behavior is a part of nature and humanity's natural condition: "Man's freedom is accompanied by a sacred awe, by a kind of divination that not everything is permitted … Restraint is therefore as natural or primeval as freedom."[32] Coercion, then, proves essential to the constitution of social order and human perfection. As Strauss adds: "If restraint is a natural to man as freedom, and restraint must in many cases be forcible restraint in order to be effective, one cannot say that the city is conventional or against nature because it is coercive society."[33] The city's role in securing justice and freedom is thus a natural or essential aspect of the city's very existence. Justice, when in the service of securing humanity greatest good, is "benevolent" coercion. "Justice and coercion are not mutually exclusive," writes Strauss,

[32] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 130.

[33] Ibid., 132.

"in fact it is not altogether wrong to describe justice as a kind of benevolent coercion."[34] What is required, then, are founders, statesmen, or legislators keen on what is right or good by nature, and the ability to make such understanding effective.

In making his case, Strauss makes an important distinction between the modern science of politics initiated by Machiavelli and that of the older, venerable "tradition," namely classical philosophy. For the classics, the city (*polis*) exists to engender and promote virtue and, ultimately, human perfection—that is, the commonwealth exists according to nature and is part of its citizens' teleological fulfillment. For Machiavelli, on the other hand, the promotion of virtue is necessary for the existence of the commonwealth—a lowering of the ultimate goal in the name of political expediency, in which virtue is a means rather than an end.[35] In making this distinction, Strauss's elitism comes into clearer view:

> The full actualization of humanity would then seem to consist, not in some sort of passive membership in civil society, but in the properly directed activity of the statesmen, the legislator, or the founder. Serious concern for the perfection of a community requires a higher degree of virtue than serious concern for the perfection of the individual.[36]

As opposed to mere expediency, Strauss takes the classical position in which nature is the standard and the "full actualization" or perfection of humanity according to nature,

---

[34] Ibid., 133.

[35] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 86-87.

[36] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 133; cf., Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*, 75, in which one may analyze this aspect of the Straussian agenda as follows: "Having no truck with the liberal fashion of moral relativism, Strauss used words that had long been banned from sophisticated discourse: such as 'good' and 'evil' and 'virtue' and 'vice.' He argued that the measure of a healthy society was not how much freedom people enjoyed (the obsession of libertarians such as Hayek) but how virtuous its citizens were. Strauss thus reinforced the neoconservatives' growing conviction that what was wrong with America was not so much the lack of individual liberty but the destruction of individual virtue." For the role of "values" in contemporary political discourse, see also Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 141ff.

becomes the ultimate goal. "All natural beings are directed toward an end [*telos*], a perfection for which they long," argues Strauss. In the case of humans:

> there is a specific perfection which belongs to each specific nature; there is especially perfection of man which is determined by the nature of man as the rational and social animal. Nature supplies the standard, a standard wholly independent of man's will; this implies that nature is good.[37]

Perfection of the community, then, requires the rule of the best (*áristos*) in the best regime (*politeia*), for nature determines that such a hierarchy is not only natural, but such a hierarchy is good.[38] And for the classics, as with Strauss, the best are the wise. The wise are those endowed by nature to rule over others for the good, that is, the full actualization, of those ruled:

> In fact, wisdom appeared to the classics as that title to rule which is highest according to nature. It would be absurd to hamper the free flow of wisdom by any regulations; hence the rule of the wise must be absolute rule.[39]

Consequently, any other configuration would be against nature itself. For instance, "to make the rule of the wise dependent on election by the unwise or consent of the unwise," argues Strauss, "would mean to subject what is by nature higher to control by what is by nature lower, i.e., to act against nature."[40] Moreover, there may be times, which, on its face, would appear to require the abandonment of nature right in order to preserve the public safety and order. But viewed another way, natural right may indeed be considered mutable and hence amendable to contingency.[41] Aristotle, for instance, in his understanding of man as a political animal, focused attention on concrete actions and

---

[37] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 85.

[38] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 140-141; 135-136.

[39] Ibid., 140.

[40] Ibid., 141.

[41] See ibid., 159ff.

decisions as opposed to a dialectic exercise directed toward the highest possible good or ideal-type of society—that is, the natural political society can be obtained without recourse to utopianism. If all decisions and actions are concerned with particular situations, Strauss suggests, then "justice and natural right reside, as it were, in concrete decisions rather than in general rules."[42] This is not to dismiss general principles of natural right out of hand. Quite the contrary. In this sense, natural right consists not only of general principles of what is right by nature, but also what is demanded by particular, concrete situations or what can be considered "extreme situations" affecting the common good.[43] The "common good," is afforded a higher status than, or rather, exists prior to, commutative or distributive justice, for the common good comprises "the mere existence, the mere survival, the mere independence, of the political community in question."[44] And in times in which the very survival of the political community is in doubt, that is, in extreme situations, "it can justly be said that the public safety is the highest law."[45] This is in accord with natural right.

The common good, it can be argued, then, requires the stewardship of competent and conscientious statesmen capable of distinguishing between normal and extreme situations. For in normal situations, the public safety is not the highest law and what is considered the precise cases right or justice obtain normally, whereas in extreme situations a different principle applies. How then does one distinguish between the two? Strauss makes the following observation:

---

[42] Ibid., 159.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 160.

[45] Ibid.

> There is no principle which defines clearly in what type of cases the public safety, and in what type of cases the precise rules of justice, have priority. For it is not possible to define precisely what constitutes an extreme situation in contradistinction to a normal situation. Every dangerous external or internal enemy is inventive to the extent that he is capable of transforming what, on the basis of previous experience, could be reasonably regarded as a normal situation into an extreme situation. Natural right must be mutable in order to be able to cope with the inventiveness of wickedness. What cannot be decided in advance by universal rules, what can be decided in the critical moment by the most competent and conscientious statesman on the spot, can be made visible as just, in retrospect, to all.[46]

Strauss makes a detailed argument distinguishing between the requirements of the many and the requirements of wise statesmanship. Within an exoteric conception of the "truth," then, can be discerned an esoteric understanding of the vagaries of civil life, and the need for statesmen attuned to the realities of human existence. But this much can be ascertained: "There is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there is no universally valid rules of action."[47] Herein lies the difference between Machiavelli and classical natural right—Machiavelli focuses exclusively on extreme situations, and it may be said, all actions regarding the state involve extreme situations.[48] If the goal then is human perfection, and nature the standard, "this implies that nature is good."[49] To go against nature is to go against humanity's natural perfection. Yet according to Strauss, this is precisely what Machiavelli initiates and his modern successors follow. Machiavelli radically breaks with the classical tradition, and, as we have seen, lowered the ultimate

---

[46] Ibid., 161. As Strauss adds, the true judge of decisions in extreme situations is the historian: "the objective discrimination between actions which were just and extreme actions which were unjust is one of the noblest duties of the historian."

[47] Ibid., 162.

[48] Ibid., 161-162 and 178-179.

[49] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 85.

goal of politics taking in tow any higher aspirations that the classics once ascribed to humanity.

Modernity, in Strauss's sense, displayed a pathological condition of a degenerative disease, a disease that threatened the soul of America. Into this mix, neoconservativism emerged as a reactionary doctrine to the perceived decline in American strengths and values, particularly in the wake of Kennedy's "New Frontier and Johnson's "Great Society"—as well as the United States' military debacles around the globe, particularly, Vietnam. While neoconservatives differ on their specific policy prescriptions, there does emerge a set of "coherent principles" by which one can begin to discern the general drift of neoconservativism as a doctrine and political movement in the United States.

THE ROOTS OF NEOCONSERVATIVISM: MODERNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The extent to which neoconservative political thinking can be considered Straussian is the degree to which neoconservative theorists focused on Strauss's notion of "modernity." Modernity for Strauss is an ideational phenomenon that coursed over Western Civilization in three waves, leaving in its wake the "crisis" of Western civilization, with moral relativism the central feature.

Strauss recognizes that some theorists have conceived of modernity as secularized biblical faith and the immanentization of the biblical worldview:

> According to a very common notion, modernity is secularized biblical faith; the other-worldly biblical faith has become radically this-worldly. Most simply: not to hope for life in heaven but to establish heaven on earth.[50]

But secularization alone cannot explain the essence of modernity. "Secularization," writes Strauss, "means the preservation of thoughts, feelings, or habits of biblical origin after the loss or atrophy of biblical faith."[51] Yet while the vestiges of biblical faith are ubiquitous in the Western tradition, modernity also embodies a series of "projects," each radical in its own way, and each sharing the notion of the possibility of transforming humanity in ways hitherto inconceivable. For Strauss, then, modernity represented a conscious and radical break from classical political thinking—a break that inevitably left Western civilization without a normative grounding.[52] "Nothing is more characteristic of modernity," argues Strauss, "than the immense variety and frequency of radical change within it."[53] It is out of this variety of radical projects that the crisis facing modern Western civilization would develop.

The Enlightenment, from its own perspective, offered the promise of finding a universal, rational basis of morality once and for all. For Strauss, however, the modern project of finding a rational basis for social order is best understood as proceeding in three waves (beginning with Machiavelli), as modern theorists devised new and more innovative ways to steer their respective societies toward a more "rational" understanding

---

[50] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 82 and 95; cf. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 186-196 in which Voegelin defines modernity in terms of the rise and spread of gnosticism—itself a corruption of classical and biblical elements, given that, it contained both teleological and axiological components.

[51] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 83.

[52] For Strauss then, the crisis of modernity, "is primarily the crisis of modern political philosophy," ibid., 82; q.v., 38-39.

[53] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 83.

of the world.[54] Perhaps more importantly, modernity signaled the attempt to transform human nature, or in Strauss's term, human material, in a way quite distinct from what classical political philosophy would regard as its nature, with "chance," or those circumstances beyond human control, tamed as well.

The first, relatively benign, wave of modernity began with Machiavelli and reached its apogee under Hobbes and Locke.[55] This wave was predicated on a fixed and unchanging view of human nature, a normative order based on natural law and revealed religion, and viewed history as essentially progressive (i.e., human social development proceeded from simple to more complex and advanced forms of social organization, wealth creation, and so on). Machiavelli initiated the first wave by severing political philosophy from its classical roots—that is, its identification of nature as the standard, and teleology as the process by which mankind achieves, potentially, its perfection.[56] Machiavelli, for instance, makes the following observation:

> Many have dreamed up republics and principalities that have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation.[57]

Thus, Machiavelli devalues classical teleology while lowering the sights concerning the "ends" for political society. Hobbes, in the "Machiavellian spirit," reinterprets natural

---

[54] Ibid., 81-98; cf., Smith, "Leo Strauss and the Straussians," 181-182.

[55] See Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 84-89.

[56] See *Strauss, Natural Right and History*, 178; Strauss argues: "Machiavelli's admiration for the political practice of classical antiquity and especially republican Rome is only the reverse side of his rejection of classical political philosophy. He rejected classical political philosophy … as useless: Classical political philosophy had taken its bearings by how man ought to live; the correct way of answering the question of the right order of society consists in taking one's bearings by how men actually do live. Machiavelli's "realistic" revolt against tradition led to the substitution of patriotism or merely political virtue for human excellence or, more particularly, for moral virtue and the contemplative life. It entailed the deliberate lowering of the ultimate goal."

[57] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* ch. 15.

law in a much more limited manner: "whereas prior to [Hobbes] natural law was understood in the light of a hierarchy of man's ends in which self-preservation occupied the lowest place, Hobbes understood natural law in terms of self-preservation alone; in connection with this, natural law came to be understood primarily in terms of the right of self-preservation as distinguished from any obligation or duty—a development which culminates in the substitution of the rights of man for natural law (nature replaced by man, law replaced by rights)."[58] Hobbes reaffirms natural right, albeit a modern natural right detached from classical teleology and explained in mechanistic terms—or more specific, in terms of instinctive human drives.[59] Early modern thinking thus culminates in the natural law of John Locke, or what Strauss refers to as "comfortable self-preservation."[60] And as Strauss adds, "Eventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice." [61] Locke had the added effect of elevating the discipline of economics to a preeminent role: "I can here only assert that the increased emphasis of economics is a consequence of this."[62]

The second wave of modernity received its impetus from Rousseau, particularly Rousseau's conception of the malleable, changeable and hence, historically conditioned quality of human nature. Rousseau's own work is largely in response to the inadequacy of Hobbes's and Locke's focus on the so-called "state of nature." That is to say, Rousseau focused on the role of civil society in human social development. The impact of

---

[58] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 88-89.

[59] Ibid., 88-89; See also McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, 156-158.

[60] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 89.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

Rousseau's historical determinism would be profound and far-reaching. "In post-Rousseauan language," Strauss argues, "man's humanity is not due to nature but to history, to the historical process, a singular or unique process which is not teleological [i.e., not according to nature]."[63] Remnants of natural law still figured in the formulations of theorists such as John Locke. The normative order Rousseau maintained, however, could only be based on the "general will" of the people and a civil religion of "minimum dogmas," both informed by the particular historical circumstances of the society in question; traditional beliefs systems, such as Christianity, were not conducive to this new view of the world, in that such belief systems constrained rather than liberated humanity, were other-worldly focused, or were based on a defunct notion of nature. "True Christians," Rousseau informs us, "are made to be slaves, and they know it and do not much mind: this short life counts for too little in their eyes."[64] History received a new understanding following Rousseau. History is understood as being linear, progressive, forward-looking and inevitable. "In so doing," writes Bruce Gregory Smith, "Rousseau initiated an understanding that, after passing through Kant, culminated in Hegel's depiction of an inevitable moment of History that brought with it an inevitable transformation of man and the natural environment."[65] This second wave of modernity can also be discerned in the contemporary opining of Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis, albeit, that history has culminated in the rather innocuous triumph of liberal, free-market democracy—or Strauss's and the neoconservatives' best available alternative.

---

[63] Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity 90.

[64] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, ch.8.

[65] Smith, "Leo Strauss and the Straussians", 182.

The third wave of modernity commenced with Nietzsche and took Rousseau's notion of malleability and changeability to its logical conclusion. Human nature, as with the second wave, is conceived as malleable, changeable, and historically conditioned. Whereas Rousseau's civil religion and the general will provided the basis of normative order—and likewise Hegel's "absolute idea" or Fukuyama's liberal democracy—Nietzsche's normative order is based on the "will to power" or the expression of the fundamental, creative force in nature in human societies, particularly by hyper-expressive individuals who have risen above and beyond conventional norms and moral constraints. Hence, if human nature is malleable and ultimately historically conditioned, Nietzsche posits that it is entirely plausible, if not desirable, that those with the will to do so set the moral tone of society. Thus, the Enlightenment "project" with its emphasis on rationalized morality is, after all, the root of Western nihilism. Finally, Heidegger—in what can be labeled Wave 3.1—mollifies Nietzsche's prescriptions, in that his aestheticism is passive as opposed to aggressive, a response to the drift in being and the purposelessness the individual being experiences in the modern world.[66] History in the third wave is no longer linear, progressive, or inevitable. Rather, history is anything but coherent. For Nietzsche it requires a "will" to shape it; for Heidegger it requires the individual to learn how to simply "ride" it, so to speak, and to create a personal sphere of comfort that allows the individual to experience being.

Neoconservatives react to modernity in a manner that seeks to minimize the effects of modernity's waves, particularly the second and third waves and their emphasis

[66] McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, 32-33; see also Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 141-156; Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption*, 155-157.

on the malleability and changeability of human nature. The notion of social engineering that emerged from the later waves can be discerned in what Karl Popper distinguishes as "piecemeal social engineering" from "utopian social engineering."[67] Moreover, one need only be reminded of the "law of unintended consequences" that can be associated with various degrees of social engineering; hence, a general tendency among neoconservatives to disavow attempts to engineer or contrive optimal social outcomes. And again, it is the United States that stands as the unique case in history, namely from the fact that the United States bridges the gap between classical political thinking and modern political thinking. To the extent that the United States embodied modern political thinking, it did so by way of the first, relatively benign first wave characterized by Locke. In addition, the United States exemplifies Montesquieu's notions of mixed government—a throwback to the classical periods classification of government by the one, the few, or the many—in its separation of powers and system of checks and balances.

In a sense, the United States embodied the best of all three classical forms of government (or "mixed" government): the monarchial "one" (Executive), the aristocratic "few" (Senate), and the plebiscitary "many" (House of Representatives). As such, the structure of the Federal government embodies a natural, organic structure in which all members of society are assured political representation. Within such a structure, individuals can pursue, to some degree, the perfection of the individual as indicated in classical natural right theory—notably through the Christian perfection of salvation—while also being free to pursue one's self-interests within the modern liberal state's

[67] See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Princeton, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971).

minimum framework of law. Moreover, the American experiment overcame one of the banes of past republics, namely, territorial overexpansion and the loss of a political center. As one political historian writes, "The crucial argument of the *Federalist Papers* ... was that a *federal* republic composed of the separate sovereignties of the individual states means that the United States could be extensive in territory and enjoy the good fortunes of republican institutions as well."[68] Newtonian physics figured into the American equation as well. Self-regulation, it is to be recalled, was an axiom for the Newtonian Universe and was extended to the social realm by theorists of the Enlightenment. In this sense, this vast, self-regulating system of interdependence and harmony of interests could, in turn, serve as the ideal model for society, its political system, and its primary political charter, its constitution.[69] In this sense, the United States Constitution embodied a self-regulating harmony of interests, not only between its competing branches of government, but by way of the pluralist theory of group behavior, very much following the general mechanical worldview of the time. Such a worldview complimented the classical republican tradition so much a part of American political experience. In this sense, the United States represented the nexus of classical republicanism and modern political and social theorizing. Nevertheless, it also embodied

[68] McClelland, *History of Western Political Thought*, 330.

[69] Such a notion can be understood in the following way: "The beauty of the Newtonian scheme was that it was designed and set in motion once and for all. The Newtonian universe was plainly the creation of a very rational God. God was the original of all legislators, giving the laws of their motion to the heavens, and this was the fundamental law of the constitution of the universe. This view in its turn sat well with a particular kind of Protestantism or deism. ... Of course, the original governments of the American colonies were not founded on any self-consciously Newtonian principles. Yet men do find ways to their governments make sense. Newtonian physics was one way to do that. It fitted exactly into the way that the governing class in America had already come to think about their government," (McClelland, *History of Western Political Thought,* 376).

a "particular kind of Protestantism or deism," hence a certain modern orthodoxy in the Voegelinian sense.

For the followers of Strauss unable to dismiss out of hand the modern elements of the American political regime, the task became one of elevating certain elements, while quietly acquiescing to others. Neoconservative thought is, in essence then, rooted in the careful balance of pre-modern and modern political thinking: between classical political philosophy and Machiavellian political expediency; between classical republicanism and classical liberalism. Furthermore, as part of a larger conservative strand of political thought, one can distinguish neoconservative thought as distinctly American and having no corresponding branch in European conservativism. Irving Kristol, for instance, argues that "There is nothing like neoconservativism in Europe, and most Europeans are highly skeptical of its legitimacy."[70] For the neoconservatives, the goal was to gain ascendancy in particular positions of authority and exercise influence over the cultural values of Americans

NEOCONSERVATIVISM RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD

Neoconservativism is a unique phenomenon in the conservatism stream of thought, given that, in the words of Dorrien, neoconservatism "does not (for the most part) attempt to restore a real or imagined conservativism of the past, but defends the modern commercial order from its various critics."[71] As we have seen, however, while neoconservatives did not actively engage in a throwback to the past (i.e., to "the lost

[70] Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion," *The Weekly Standard* 8, Issue 47 (August 26, 2003).

[71] Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, x-ix.

glories of medieval Catholicism, seventeenth-century orthodoxy, nineteenth-century capitalism, or the Old South") they do engage in an agenda to temper the impact of modernity, that is the "social order and ethos created by Enlightenment criticism, modern science and technology, and especially capitalist economics."[72] Rather, neoconservatives reacted to the vulgar, conformist culture engendered in the United States by the confluence of many variables in the post-World War II era, a culture in itself the logical outcome of modernity. In this sense, modernity had reshaped reality for many Americans, a reality that for several generations of Americans hitherto, had resisted some of its radical immanentist implications. And while the neoconservatives do share an affinity with the so-called New Right, as opposed to the paleoconservativism of, say, Russell Kirk, or libertarians such as Hayek or Robert Nozick,[73] it is argued here that the Straussian influence directs neoconservatives along the Platonic lines of "noble lies," thus engendering a unique intellectual elitism.[74]

---

[72] Ibid., 2, ix..

[73] The New Right is often distinguished from older forms of conservatism, given that, it demands a certain degree of radical change. For instance, "New Right thinkers believe that political decline can only be arrested by encouraging individual initiative and competition. This requires a reduction in the welfare provision and redistributive taxation which characterize the state influenced by socialism. The resulting emphasis on a minimal state distinguishes the New Right from Fascism and pushes some thinkers (e.g., Nozick) toward libertarianism. However, the New Right embraces nationalism, sometimes based, like its individualism, on a form of Social Darwinism" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995, Ted Honderich, ed., s.v., "Right, the political New"); see also Ted Honderich, *Conservativism*, (Harmondsworth, 1990).

[74] See Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion," in which Kristol argues: "Neocons do not like the concentration of services in the welfare state and are happy to study alternative ways of delivering these services. But they are impatient with the Hayekian notion that we are on the road to serfdom. … they know that the 19th-century idea, so neatly propounded by Herbert Spencer in his 'The Man Versus the State' was an historical eccentricity. …Though they find much to be critical about, they tend to seek intellectual guidance in the democratic wisdom of Tocqueville, rather than in the Tory nostalgia of, say, Russell Kirk. But it is only to a degree that neocons are comfortable in modern America. The steady decline in our democratic culture, sinking to new levels of vulgarity, does unite neocons with traditional conservatives—though not with those libertarian conservatives who are conservative in economics but unmindful of culture. The upshot is a quite unexpected alliance between neocons who include a fair proportion of secular intellectuals, and religious traditionalists."

Irving Kristol, considered by many the "godfather" of neoconservative political thinking, is attributed as saying that "a neoconservative is just a liberal mugged by reality." For the founders of the movement, this harsh reality reared its head in the abomination socialist-leaning liberals created in the post-World War II, "Great Society" era and the counter-culture spawned by the youth rebellion against the establishment in the 1960s. Despite their rather extreme aversion to the New Left, these intellectuals' formative period actually began in the intellectual left of the inter-war years.[75] Indeed, the roots of neoconservativism can be discerned in a group of New York intellectuals with strong socialist, if not Marxist or Trotskyite, sympathies. For youths weathering the Great Depression and the excesses of capitalism, such leftist tendencies may have come naturally. The Soviet Union seemed to offer a promise for idealistic youths from the poor Jewish sections of New York City. The Soviet Union, however, failed to provide a suitable model for social and economic order. And by the time that the reality of the situation in the Soviet Union turned especially sour, and with the war in Vietnam a increasingly an intractable quagmire for the United States (and with *détente* framing American foreign policy), these thinkers had significantly broke with their leftist origins and sought to strengthen the American position both at home and in relation to the rest of the world. Micklethwait and Wooldridge explain the genesis of the neoconservative movement in this way:

> For conservatives of all sorts, the excesses of the left in the 1960s and 1970s presented a golden opportunity. Buckley's *National Review* looked prescient rather than eccentric. Milton Friedman's once dangerously radical ideas attracted a growing crowd of admirers. From the 1970s onward Chicago-School-trained

[75] See Irving Kristol, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism," in *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), ch. 7.

> economist won more Nobel prizes than economists from any other institution. (even if the only country that seemed prepared to implement their ideas was Chile, an international pariah). However, the most important change on the intellectual Right was the defection of one group of liberal intellectuals, for whom the 1960s was a turning point.[76]

This latter group, the intellectual Right, foremost of which was Kristol, along with his peers from the City College of New York, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, and Norman Podhoretz, all Jewish and from relatively poor backgrounds, and all with radical socialist beginnings, would form the core of this new conservative movement.

Garry Dorrien defines neoconservativism as "an intellectual movement originated by former leftists that promotes militant anticommunism, capitalist economics, a minimum welfare state, the rule of traditional elites, and a return to traditional cultural values."[77] Dorrien writes a definitive analysis on the "roots and branches" of neoconservativism, except for one significant misjudgement in his statement that "With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the election of a Democratic president [i.e., William Jefferson Clinton], it is unlikely that neoconservativism can regain in the 1990s the political influence it achieved in the 1980s."[78] Not only did the neoconservative regain their political influence in Washington with the election of George W. Bush, they helped redefine contemporary American conservativism as a whole. Kristol, for instance, argues that the "historical task and political purpose of neoconservativism would seem to be this: to convert the republican party, and American conservativism in general, against

---

[76] Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*, 72.

[77] Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 8; It is important to point out, neoconservatives have a qualified acceptance of the welfare-state, in that, it provided necessary social stability in the face of economic crisis.

[78] Ibid.

their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing modern democracies."

Social science proved vital in the conservative project to thwart the liberal domination of the levers of American power, including not only academics, but also key policy and bureaucratic positions. As Micklethwait and Wooldridge indicate:

> Crucially, the neocons spoke the language of social science. Conservatives had long insisted that government programs weakened the *natural bonds of society* [emphasis mine], without ever being able to prove it. The neocons showed that social problems were much harder to understand than they appeared—and that the social engineering of the Great Society sort was plagued by perverse consequences [i.e., unintended consequences]. … The neocons were muckrakers of the Right, discrediting government just as the original muckrakers had discredited the robber barons[79]

Consequently, the domestically oriented neoconservatives of the later-1960's and early-1970s, have, under the administration of George W. Bush, gained an ascendancy in key foreign policy circles, particularly in the United States foreign and Department of State and the Defense Department, with such names as Richard Armitage at State, and Paul Wolfolwitz and Donald Rumsfeld at Defense.[80]

Prior to the recent emphasis on an aggressive foreign policy, most visible in the attempt to change the political and social structure of the Middle East, neoconservatives reserved significant attention for the American political, social and moral landscape and thus, thwarting the impact of modernity on American society. In the influential period of post-War American political thinking, the budding neoconservative movement gives particular attention to the "New Class," or the rising self-interested class of non-property

---

[79] Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*:, 73.

[80] See The Project for the American Century, for specific policy prescriptions offered by neoconservatives (www.americancentury.org).

owning managers, bureaucrats, intellectuals and technical specialists, hallmarks of the postwar technocratic elite. And as Dorrien argues, to understand what was happening in at the time, one needed to understand the particular interests of this burgeoning class:

> What was called 'liberalism' in America was largely a rationalization of the interests of New Class managers, lawyers, bureaucrats, social workers, consultants, and academics. Liberalism rationalized the creation of an ever-expanding welfare state, providing meaningful employment and ego gratification for the hordes of newly educated consumers.[81]

The new class, then, was emerging as the dominant "personality type" of the post-War era, with their particular interests, conceptions of authority, ethics, decision-making and so forth, following in tow. As opposed to the conflict instigated over distribution (or redistribution) of physical resources, the New Class laid claim on a new form of status and power— status and power predicated upon bureaucratic or specialized expertise. Capitalism and bourgeois society had created this New Class, which in turn, emphasized the exclusive legitimacy of its status and power on its expertise and specialized knowledge.[82] Moreover, this New Class stood poised to threaten the status quo by reshaping society in its own image, with the Great Society and the shift in wealth and power the apogee of the postwar technocratic agenda.

Ethical discourse mirrored the interests and agenda of the New Class, in that, it seemed to embody the worldview of its predominant personality type, the technocrat. Such an ethic can be summarized in such technical-theoretical constructs as John Rawls's "maximin rule" and his "difference principle"—or the notion that social systems should

---

[81] Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 14.

[82] Ibid., 13-18.

be constructed so that any inequalities in the system should benefit the most worse off.[83] Rawls identifies two principles in his attempt to understand justice as "fairness"—that is, principles that rationally justify any inequalities inherent in society. The first principle involves the distribution of basic rights and liberties in which each individual is to have an unequivocal right to the most extensive and fundamental liberty that is compatible with a similar liberty for others. By this Rawls intends to demonstrate, that despite inequalities resulting from birth and other environmental factors, that the individual possesses certain rights that take precedence over the general welfare. The second principle involves opening up positions in society to all members and guaranteeing a share in the wealth generated by society. Rawls states his second principle as; "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all."[84] By this Rawls indicates that inequalities in society can be overcome by allowing and encouraging individuals to participate in society by removing the barriers restricting such participation.

Moreover, for Rawls, the values of a society must be developed outside and prior to the society itself. He calls this hypothetical situation the "original position." It is during this original position and under a so-called "veil of ignorance" these values are

---

[83] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, Mass, 1971); cf., Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 30-31. Bloom challenges Rawls in arguing, "this reversal of the founding intention with respect to minorities is most striking. For the Founders, minorities are in general bad things, mostly identical to factions, selfish groups who have no concern as such for the common good. Unlike older political thinkers, they entertained no hopes of suppressing factions and educating a united or homogenous citizenry. Instead they constructed an elaborate machinery [e.g., Newtonian] to contain factions in such a way that they would cancel one another and allow for the pursuit of the common good. The good is the guiding consideration in their thought, although it is arrived at, less directly than in classical political thought, by tolerating faction" (p. 31).

[84] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 252-254; In addition, the *maximum minimorum*, or "maximin" can be understood as "Game- and decision-theoretical strategies which require one to make one's worst possible outcome as good as possible (that is, to maximize the minimum). Maximin grounds Rawls's 'difference principle,' that political institutions should make the position of the worst-off group as good as possible" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995, Ted Honderich, ed., s.v., "maximin and minimax").

objectively generated and, in turn, make up the ethos of society. This ethos is centered unequivocally on equality. Rawls posits that rewards should be distributed equally, unless a departure from such equality is required for ensuring advantages for those less well off. As Rawls writes, "All social primary goods—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution…is to the advantage of the least favored."[85] The values proposed by Rawls are enforceable by the state and not left to any virtuous actions on the part of citizens. It suggests a redistribution of wealth and other values when the tables are tilted, so to speak, in favor in certain groups or classes. This redistribution is justified by the idea of social justice and builds on earlier liberal thinking.

Straussians and neoconservatives target Rawls as the logical outcome of modern moral theorizing, particularly in its unintended consequence of privileging the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, thus weakening American political society. Rawls, in their view, shrouds this agenda in a rather radical understanding of justice and toleration. "John Rawls," argues Allan Bloom, "is almost a parody of this tendency, writing hundreds of pages to persuade men, and proposing a scheme of government that would force them, not to despise anyone."[86] But this is not all. As Bloom adds:

> So indiscriminateness is a moral imperative because it opposite is discrimination. This folly means that men are not permitted to seek for the natural human good [i.e., excellence] and admire it when found, for such discovery is coeval with the discovery of the bad and contempt for it. Instinct and intellect must be suppressed by education. The natural soul is to be replaced by an artificial one.[87]

---

[85] Ibid.

[86] Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 30.

[87] Ibid.

One could further argue that the implementation of such a theoretical construct would require a cadre of experts to determine what is discrimination at all times, places, events, relations, and so forth, an understanding beyond the purview of most Americans.

In addition to a somewhat technical understanding of morality engendered by the New Class, there is the "myth of objective consciousness," the post-World War Two value system that equated happiness and human worth in terms of financial security and material possessions while entrusting decision-making to the so-called value-free "experts."[88] Americans under this objective understanding of reality became, as David Riesman argues in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), "other-directed" people, conformist rather than motivated by some sense of public virtue: "What is common to other-directed people is that contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual—either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and through mass media."[89] William Whyte's *Organization Man* (1954) typified the prevailing "social ethic" of the immediate post-War era, an ethic that legitimates social pressures on the individual to conform to an organizational culture. "By social ethic," argues Whyte, "I mean that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual." [90] Moreover, a decline in the once dominant Protestant Ethic, according to Whyte, engendered the rise in the "belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in 'belongingness' as the ultimate need of

---

[88] See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of the Counter Culture*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), xii-xiii, 1-47, 207-215,.

[89] David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Revel Denny, *The Lonely Crowd*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Publications, 1950),18.

[90] William Whyte, *Organization Man*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956) 6,

the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness."[91] The social ethic, then, indicated a significant shift in American consciousness and the bonds that united American's in a meaningful political community. And while one generation willingly acquiesced to the conformist-consumerist culture propagated in the post-War era, their children, dissatisfied and alienated, rebelled against it. As Kenneth Keniston argues in *The Uncommitted* (1960), for one generation of Americans, objectivity and rationalism gave way to subjectivity, conformity to individual creativity and self-expression, deferred gratification to instant gratification, the past and future for the experience of the present, that is, a cult of the present:

> We can distinguish two possible directions in any effort to intensify the present. One is a search for adventure, active and vigorous, which emphasizes the role of the actor in creating experience, in making new and heightened experiences for himself. An adventurous approach to experience leads to an equation of self and activity, in which the individual seeks to become what he does… The more passive form of the cult of the present is the search for sentience, and it is this search that that characterizes the alienated. … Whereas the adventurous seeks to change the world so that it stimulates him in new ways, the sentient seeks to change himself so that he is more open to stimulation.[92]

Existentialism and the notion to "be here now," then, became the mantra for a generation of Americans. Consequently, a counter-culture emerged as a challenge to the "establishment." For neoconservatives in tune with both the shortcoming of both the establishment and the New Left, America's drift to the political left was a harbinger of greater social malaise, the logical outcome instrumental reason and of unrestrained modernity.

---

[91] Ibid.; cf., Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Analysis*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 116-117.

[92] Kenneth Keniston, *The Uncommitted,* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1960), 222.

But the New Class would also indelibly shape the political landscape of the United States, primarily in the elevation of the "Fourth Branch" of government, and the growth of bureaucracy and its legacy of bloated government, "red tape." Bureaucratic authority itself became conceived and justified in terms of Weberian "rational-legal" authority, or authority in which obedience is given to "the persons exercising the authority of office under it only by virtue of the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of their office."[93] Moreover, rational society reached its full form in Weber's bureaucratic ideal-type translated into bureaucracy's key values, efficiency and effectiveness: "Experience tends universally to show that purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization [is] from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings."[94] Weber's ideas on bureaucracy would thus form an essential part of the "orthodox" school of public administration in the United States and the post-War technocratic society, indelibly shaping an objective consciousness for a generation of Americans.

Decision-making, as well, reflected the self-interests of the New Class in that technocratic decision-making followed the "rational-comprehensive" model and the value of efficiency. The rational-comprehensive model developed as the "ideal" model for administrative decision-making during the formative period of an orthodox school of public administration in the mid-twentieth century. The model became a essential mode of governmental decision-making and has remained a viable model, albeit with serious

---

[93] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, (New York: Free Pres, 1964), 328.

[94] Ibid., 337.

qualifications. The model uses a systems analysis approach by means of analytical and quantitative techniques in problem identifying and problem solving, and seeks to present decision makers with alternative solutions to problems.[95] Despite such a comprehensive approach to decision-making, bureaucratic decisions were characterized as being often muddled, overly qualified, and subject to rational-legal constraints. In the bureaucratic state that seemed a natural corollary, Herbert Simon's "satisficing" (or the notion that decision-making in organizations, and by extension, decision-making concerning public goods, reflects the bare minimum of satisfaction, and not optimal outcomes) and Charles Lindblom's "Science of Muddling Through" or "incrementalism" in decision-making, gave a whole new meaning to piecemeal change—in this case, change is subject to constraints, not out of deference to the past, but to the complexities of modern, technological society.[96] Simon's "bounded rationality" became an influential concept in explaining the working of a highly rationalist, technocratic society, while Lindblom stressed concern that *polyarchy* (or the notion that no single, "monolithic elite" exercises complete control over government and society, but rather a plurality of specialized elites compete and bargain with one another for influence in a policy marketplace) would

---

[95] See James W. Fesler and Donald F. Kettl, *The Politics of the Administrative Process*, (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House, 1996), 220-222; Features of the Rational-comprehensive model include: (1) defining the problem and goal to be addressed; (2) defining the acceptable and appropriate values and measures to be employed—i.e. ethical considerations, legal concerns, available resources; public opinion, time constraints; (3) developing an exhaustive list of alternative solutions; (4) cost-benefit analysis (determine the consequences of the various alternatives—i.e. assessing the probability of success or failure, possible adverse effects, and so on); (5) determining utility of decision (maximization of utility); and so on. The basic critique of the model is that it assumes a static situation in which relevant conditions do not change, and no new information becomes available—i.e. that rationality is "unbound" from cognitive and environmental constraints.

[96] See especially James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, *Organizations*, (New York: Wiley, 1958) , 140-141 and Charles Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review*, 19 (Spring 1995), 79-88.

descend into corporatism.[97] What is more, in the midst of Johnson's Great Society, a seemingly permanent war-footing, and so forth, state and industry formed an alliance in which Theodore J. Lowi's interest-group liberalism seemed to characterize the new American political philosophy[98] than did any notion of Madisonian pluralism:

> The new Great Society programs bore particularly strong evidence of interest-group liberal thinking. …Interest-group liberalism thus seems closer to being the established, operative ideology of the American elite than any other body of doctrine. The United States is far from 100 percent a corporate state; but each administration, beginning with the New Deal Revolution, has helped reduce the gap.[99]

Interest-group liberalism is a corruption and impotence of the traditional American democratic form of government. The contrast between pluralism and interest-group liberalism is that the latter overlooks specific groups *capturing* and *controlling* specific agencies without truly having to compete for policy rewards—since the powerful, oligopolistic groups discourage new group formation, and hence, limit any form of checks and balance that could force compromise between groups.

Accordingly, technical expertise was not limited to academic, governmental or public organization. In the realm of business administration, management of America's great corporations was no longer in the hands of owners—now understood as a vast away of "shareholders." Rather, management of corporations was now in the hands of a highly

---

[97] See Robert A. Dahl and Charles Lindblom, *Politics, Economics, and Welfare: Planning and Politico-Economic Systems Resolved into Basic Social Process*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963) 272-348.

[98] Ted Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969), 55-97.

[99] Ibid., 83-84; "Interest-group liberalism" is defined as a view of the policy-making process in which government distributes policy-making privileges to interest groups, thereby limiting government' choices and its ability to do long-range planning; cf., *Federalist* 10 and Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 200-203.

educated technical elite, detached from ownership. With corporate power and control detached from ownership, those in control of the corporation (i.e., New Class management) exercised control in rather Weberian terms; that is, in terms of the "imperative control" over human beings and with the chief aim of efficiency and profitably—quite detached from the impetus of corporate charters, which, in theory, are supposed to serve some public good.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE RESPONSE TO THE NEW CLASS: RESTORING VIRTUE'S LOST LOVELINESS

The neoconservative agenda is in large part a reaction to the rise of the rigid, bureaucratic-technocratic state and the weakening of American society in the face of the impact of modernity—of which the bureaucratic state and its focus on "objectivity" in both thought and action is seen as the logical outcome. But neoconservatives also reacted to counter-culture that was engendered by the conformist social ethic of the post-War era. Such a culture had the consequence of spawning a wave of expressive—and one may say, excessive—individualism, undermining American's traditional sense of community.

Since American political society was forged in both pre-modern (i.e., classical republicanism) and early modern values (i.e., Lockean civil government), the neoconservative critique of post-War America distinguished a drift from traditional American values of civic virtue and associational life, to a life distinguished first off, as culture of conformity, and later, toward a culture of excessive individualism. The "myth of objective consciousness," on the other hand, far from being the prevailing social norm of the post-War era, is but a symptom of a much larger social malaise. The ideal

characteristics of the New Class's society (that of "objective knowledge"), shrouded in the fact-value dichotomy and justifying the authority of technocrats and their possession of objective, technical expertise; an objective standard of evaluation—i.e., the "American Dream" (promised *absolute* happiness) and Rawls's theory of justice; and the notion of deferred gratification (or that hard work will be rewarded by high standard of living and material wealth), did not reflect the reality of American society. By the late-1970s and early-1980s, the neoconservative critique of contemporary conditions in the United States (e.g., economic stagnancy, low productivity and innovation, military setbacks, bureaucratic "red tape," etc.) gained saliency. Gary Dorrien makes the following observation:

> Though they repeatedly reaffirmed their support for the welfare state, neoconservatives during the 1980s increasingly claimed that the *chief* consequences of government action were the unintended ones. The New Class was not only obstructing America's efforts to fighting communism, it was sapping America's vital entrepreneurial energies. The New Class wanted government to be strong and America to be weak. Neoconservatives fought the New Class on both fronts. Their skepticism about government efforts to promote greater equality hardened into principled opposition …and the need for greater military spending and foreign military intervention[100]

In addition, the New Class's vision of a more egalitarian, efficient society degenerated into a vulgar, conformist, "consumer-culture," where instant gratification displaced deferred gratification, which in turn spawned alienation and a "counter-culture."

The emergence of a New Left and the threat that counter-culture posed to the traditional American character raised the ire of intellectuals such as Irving Kristol. Reality stood ready to mystify, if not mug, anyone who took the time and effort to discern the truth of American society. "When we lack the will to see things as they really are,"

---

[100] Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 17.

writes Kristol, "there is nothing so mystifying as the obvious."[101] This was as much true was for the student radicals of the 1960s protesting against the "establishment" as for the establishment itself: The power and influence of the establishment was such, that the counter-culture became co-opted by the very establishment it rebelled against. Kristol, thus, drew a careful distinction between the concerns of the leftist radicals (i.e., the "New Left") and the actual conditions that prevailed in American society:

> *The enemy of liberal capitalism toady is not so much socialism as nihilism* [emphasis in original]. Only liberal capitalism doesn't see nihilism as an enemy, but rather as just another splendid business opportunity. One of the most extraordinary features of our civilization today is the way in which the "counterculture" of the New Left is being received and sanctioned as a "modern" culture appropriate to "modern" bourgeois society.[102]

Hence, capitalism in its libertarian variant, leads to libertinism, libertinism to moral relativism and nihilism, nihilism to cultural decline.[103]

But is capitalism in itself altogether detrimental? Kristol offers a qualified argument. Liberal capitalism, according to Kristol offered three promises, but could ultimately deliver on only two.[104] First, capitalism promised the improvement of the material conditions for all citizens, a promise, in the words of Kristol, "without precedent

---

[101] Kristol, Two Cheers for Capitalism, 239.

[102] Ibid., ch.7.

[103] Ibid.; Here Kristol makes a critical argument against Milton Friedman's argument against unrestrained capitalistic competition: "one gathers that [Friedman] is, in the name of 'libertarianism,' reluctant to impose any prohibition or inhibition on the libertine tendencies of modern bourgeois society. He seems to assume …that these dynamics cannot, in the nature of things, be self-destructive—that 'self-realization' in a free society can only lead to the creation of a self that is compatible with such a society. … In the end, [however], you can maintain the belief that private vices, freely exercised, will lead to public benefits only if you are further persuaded that human nature can never be utterly corrupted by these vices, but rather, will transcend them. The idea of bourgeois virtue has been eliminated from Friedman's conception of bourgeois society, and has been replaced by the idea of individual liberty. The assumption is that, in 'the nature of things,' the latter will certainly lead to the former [i.e., individual liberty leads to public virtue]. There is much hidden metaphysics here, and of a dubious kind."; cf. Keniston, *The Uncommitted,*222.

[104] Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 240ff.

in human history." Second, the liberal capitalist system promised an "equally unprecedented measure of individual freedom for all of these same citizens." With this in mind, it was posited that within this framework of the freedom to pursue material want-satisfaction, the individual could also pursue that unique impulse toward self-perfection—that is, the practice of "individual" virtue—and that this free exercise of individual virtue "would aggregate into a just society." It is this third promise, according to Kristol, that failed to materialize. Moreover, it was this third promise, or the lack thereof, that spawned the resentment and doubt of the radicals and their left-wing academic instigators toward the "establishment."

For Kristol, it was the specious arguments by liberal capitalist apologists such as Hayek that was at the root of the problem, not simply disaffected youth in the streets and disconnected "academic scribblers" in their ivory towers. Despite the brilliance of his argument, Hayek's emphasis on the "free" society over that of the "just," placed Hayek on a plane not much higher than the apologists for the counter-culture. For Hayek, utility was the root of morality. Moral behavior was essentially behavior conducive to material gain. Moreover, for Hayek's and his libertarian followers, no constraints of any form ought to be imposed on an individual practicing his or her own way of life or freely exchanging goods and services. To the extent that any form of authority exist in society, it done by way of the highly decentralized personal decisions; in this sense, the market becomes the authority in governing human affairs, albeit a highly decentralized form of authority. As Milton Friedman argues:

> So long as effective freedom of exchange is maintained, the central feature of the market organization of economic activity is that it prevents one person from

> interfering with another in respect of most of his activities. … And the market does this impersonally and without centralized authority.[105]

Hence, individuals should be free in their consumption habits, how they use their individualized knowledge, and more generally, how they choose to expressive their selves in the market/social environment. Thus in addition to maximizing individual liberty, or the notion of freedom as an end in itself, freedom leads to "diversity" in society, opening up new avenues of consumer choices, means of self-expression and aesthetics. As Friedman adds:

> What the market does is to reduce greatly the range of issues that must be decided through political means, and thereby to minimize the extent to which government need participate directly in the game. The characteristic feature of action through political channels is that it tends to require or enforce substantial conformity. The great advantage of the market, on the other hand, is that it permits wide diversity.[106]

The logical outcome of this expanded understanding of freedom is not difficult to ascertain. Freed from the moral constraints that had once kept the excesses of capitalism in check and with significant growth in the American middle-class, American culture witnessed the growth of all manner of personal lifestyles, consumer trends, and a pervasive consumer culture. With the market mentality new demands had to be generated in order to meet changes in consumer tastes. As such, ever-new lifestyles choices developed along with changes in consumer tastes, for instance, cuisine, music, literature, art, theatre, and so forth. Cultures, nevertheless, have a degree of permanence in their key attributes, attributes which in turn as passed on to each succeeding generation through the socialization process. In a sense, a consumer culture with is endless changes

---

[105] Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 14-15.

[106] Ibid.,

to placate consumers' tastes is no culture at all. And perhaps more importantly, with the consumer culture, freedom devolved in to license with American pluralism taking on the air of entitlement for these disparate groups and their claim to self-expression.

The influence of Hayek and his intellectual heirs complete the transition toward an aesthetic orientation that would have been unpalatable to "traditional" American society if such ideas came from the Left. When couched in terms of maximizing individual freedom and liberty, such ideas gained credence for many Americans. Freedom, in Hayek's sense, however, is freedom detached from any greater meaningful political community. Far from freedom being the means to achieve a "good" or "just" society, freedom, under Hayek's thought, becomes an end in itself. In this way, Hayek and his intellectual heirs completed the drift toward moral relativism initiated by the political Left. Nowhere is this more readily seen than in the cooptation of the counter-culture by the consumer culture.

The end result of this development was the drift toward amorality and a society characterized by a "winner-take-all" mentality. The consequences of this mentality are profound. In addition to growing inequality, contemporary American society vastly, if not disproportionately, awards individuals who in fact contribute little or nothing to society's overall material well-being. That far from making the best use of knowledge in society, such a mentality actually channels knowledge into its most unproductive uses.[107] "Winner-take-all" markets, argue Robert Frank and Philip Cook, have these added consequences:

---

[107] See Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society."

> They have lured some of our most talented citizens into socially unproductive, sometimes even destructive, tasks. In an economy that already invests too little in the future, they have fostered wasteful patterns of investment and consumption.[108]

Sports stars, entertainers, artist of all sorts, and even socialites—famous for simply being famous—command a higher status and establish themselves as central moral characters in contemporary American society simply by their ability to command huge compensation, attract large audiences and live lavish lifestyles. But Frank and Philips note that even in such areas as law, medicine, journalism and academia there has been an intrusion of the "winner-take-all" market mentality, generating "stars" in their own right and undermining the vital roles these professions impart to American society.[109]

All of this aggravates the neoconservative concern with the relativistic, nihilistic tendencies of a morally unfettered capitalist economy and their qualified acceptance of the market. "From having been a *capitalist, republican community*, with shared values and a quite unambiguous claim to the title of a just order," Kristol writes, "the United States became a *free, democratic society* where the will to success and privilege was severed from its moral moorings."[110] But even more important, Kristol argues that Hayek's emphasis on the free over the just set Western society on the course of nihilism, given that, while Hayek states we know what freedom is—that is, freedom is the net result of institutionalized behaviors that allowed individuals to pursue their self-interests and thus benefited society as a whole by way of efficiency, innovation, and so on—"we

---

[108] Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than the Rest of Us*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 4.

[109] Ibid., 3-4.

[110] Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 246.

have no generally accepted knowledge of what justice is."[111] Hence, Hayek fits squarely in the "modern" scheme, advocating a market-oriented aestheticism as opposed to a will to power of Nietzsche or the passive existentialism of Heidegger.[112] In this sense, Hayek's argument, and that of his followers, displays the nihilism so much a concern for Strauss and his followers.

Hayek's argument that there are no criteria, not even merit, by which a distribution of wealth can be made to correspond in a "free" society, raises the indignation of Kristol:

> In the same way as men cannot for long tolerate a sense of spiritual meaningless in their individual lives, so they cannot for long accept a society in which power, privilege, and property are not distributed according to some morally meaningful criteria. … So I conclude, despite Professor Hayek's ingenious analysis, that men cannot accept the historical accidents of the marketplace—seen merely as accidents—as the basis for an enduring and legitimate entitlement to power, privilege, and property.[113]

Perhaps more telling is Kristol's contention that Hayek's argument is not tenable outside a small, academic circle: "In actual fact, Professor Hayek's rationale for modern capitalism is never used outside a small academic enclave; I even suspect it cannot be believed except by those whose minds have been shaped by overlong exposure to scholasticism.[114] Such is the power of scholasticism, nonetheless, as can be seen in its ability to influence the organic truth of a society; or that truth essential for "peace and concord." The market has come to be generally accepted as the most viable means to achieve the *free* society, and the free society is good in that it achieves peace and concord

---

[111] Ibid.; cf. Hayek, *The Constitution of liberty*, 85-102.

[112] See Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 141-156.

[113] Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 247.

[114] Ibid.

as individuals go about fulfilling their material desires—witness, Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis and President George W. Bush's National Security Strategy.

Translated in terms of civil theology, the civil religion that served to uphold and maintain the classical republican values of civic and personal virtue atrophied under the strain of a "commercial and opulent" society—an individualist society, again, predicated upon a mechanistic-materialistic orientation. Tocqueville, for instance, while admiring American's propensity as "joiners" in conjunction with a high degree of civil association, also warned of the drift toward a hyper-individualism of sorts, an individualism that drifts from a natural self-interest, or self-interests rightly understood, toward that of "downright selfishness." "Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself."[115] Selfishness, Tocqueville thereafter warns, is detrimental to both public and individual virtue, in that "selfishness blights the germ of all virtue; individualism at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness."[116] Hence conciliation between private and public virtue is in order, particularly in the face of a growing negative individualism.

Kristol's warning takes shape along similar lines: "if our private and public worlds are ever again, in our lifetimes, to have a congenial relationship—if virtue is to regain her lost loveliness—then some such combination of the reforming spirit [i.e.,

---

[115] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ch. 2.

[116] Ibid.

liberalism properly understood] with the conservative ideal seems to me to be what is most desperately needed."[117] And while neither Tocqueville nor Kristol labels it as such, it is the American civil religion that traditionally served this function. But while neoconservatives attempted to restore what they saw as a degenerating American society, they were misguided in their project to restore what they saw as the virtues of "traditional" American values. Their notion of civil virtue would be closely tied to Protestant Christianity that, in the course of the American experience, had taken on radical implications. In effect, the neoconservative agenda to revitalize American society had the unintended consequences of further weakening the social fabric in the United States both in terms of public morality and in the Straussian context of limiting the impact of modernity. In their attempt to arrest the social disintegration unleashed by a fetish for unfettered freedom, and in order to bring unity and purpose to the American people and to foster a "congenial" relationship between public and private life, they had amplified the notion of a unique nation with a unique purpose or destiny in human history—a purpose or destiny that in affect shared many of the immanentist implications of other great ideological movements of the not so distant past. America's "destiny" would be not only restoring virtue's loveliness at home, but also eradicating evil on the global front, thereby spreading such loveliness abroad.

[117] Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 252-253.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONSTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION, OR RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AMERICAN CIVILIS THEOLOGIA?

> If the human mind is allowed to follow its own bent, it will regulate political society and the City of God in the same uniform manner and will, I dare say, seek to harmonize earth and heaven.
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Civil theology has been a salient feature of politics and political philosophy since the time of Plato. Plato, for instance, foresaw the need to craft a "civil theology" for the mass of Athenian citizens who could not take the cognitive leap from the realm of shadows, that is of popular myth, into true light of philosophy. By doing so, Plato thus distinguishes a natural inequality among humans, with the philosopher inhabiting the highest realms of being and serving to facilitate in the construction of life-giving myths for the bulk of political society. And whereas Western civilization emerged from the Middle Ages without a viable civil religion for the masses in the emerging nation-states, a condition that engendered a scramble among various theorists to devise a substitute for the breakdown of existing Christian symbolisms,[1] the American case reveals a unique situation in which a civil theology developed organically and functioned to bind

[1] Past attempts of Western theorist included the formation of a "minimum dogma," immanentist movements (or attempts by sectarian communities to "impose by force their immanentist beliefs on a society as a state cult"), and Locke's civil government, itself predicated on a minimum dogma of sort, that is, a judicious balance between tolerance and intolerance, and with the core values of the system being that of a secular, Protestant community.

Americans to their core values but also functioned to limit radical spiritual outbursts. This American civil religion, as explicated by Robert Bellah and alluded to by theorists such as Alexis de Tocqueville, unfolded in a rather organic fashion, incorporating elements of Protestant Christianity, Judeo-covenantalism, classical republicanism, and a degree of mysticism as embodied in such notions of *Annuit Cœptis, Novus Ordo Seclorum,* Providence, Anglo-American "exceptionalism," and so forth. The American civil religion, then, can be understood in large measure as a symbolic structure that incorporates myth, philosophy, revelation, and mysticism, all of which function to link American political society to a greater transcendent reality and thereby revealing America's self-interpretation of itself as a representative of transcendent source of order. These symbols, moreover, are played out by Americans at a seemingly subconscious level, informing all aspects of public life in the United States, such as public rituals, ceremonies and, one may add, the spontaneous outburst of patriotism following the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks.

Unlike other political revolutions in which there were sudden and often violent outburst inaugurating a new political order (e.g., the French or Russian Revolutions, or the stunning rise of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi transformation of German society) and accompanied by the epiphany of a new, absolute ideology serving as the state cult, the American civil religion has no absolute epiphanic moment (although such events as the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Gettysburg and Second Inaugural Addresses may come close). Rather, the American civil religion evolved over the early decades of the American republic, developing into its fullest by the mid-nineteenth century. Tocqueville, for instance, wrote of the strong degree of civil

association among Americans and the role of religion in binding Americans to one another, while Lincoln's "dialectical limit" (or representation articulated to the level of a government and political society "of the people, by the people, and for the people") indicated the level to which sovereignty had been achieved. It was only after the symbols of the American civil religion atrophied under the strain of modernity did philosophic and expediential consideration turn attention to revitalizing the traditional civil cult. The result of this project was the development of a nascent contrivance initiated as a restorative program with the intention of maintaining a perceived status quo and a revived myth of the American nation. Nevertheless, this particular contrivance would ultimately lead to significant unintended consequences in its course, resulting in what can only be described as a somewhat benign form of American totalitarianism.

While the older civil religion still commands influence over the politico-religious symbols of American society, it is the nascent contrivance that is emerging as the alternative to the tradition. Furthermore, the nascent theology functions very much as a civil theology in the Platonic sense, maintaining order by way of a myth structure based on noble falsehoods. And although this project seeks to bolster so-called "traditional" American values and would appear to uphold the older civil religion, the project actually digresses into a project similar to the ideological constructions of the past, albeit by way of a corruption of traditional symbols rather than an outburst of ideological fervor. One group of theorists above all others have distinguish themselves in the construction of this theology; namely, the neoconservatives. Neoconservatives recognized the gravity of the spiritual decline occurring in the United States and consequently America's slip into moral relativism, nihilism, and the rending of the social fabric of American society. In

keeping with Leo Strauss's emphasis on Platonic thought, it is conceivable that they attempted to craft a myth structure and a shared moral framework in which the American people and their society could find new meaning and purpose. Building on the thought of Strauss, these thinkers sought to bring political philosophy back to the forefront of political and social discourse (at least among intellectual elites), with an emphasis on classical natural right and with the intention of tempering of the effects of modernity by way of the principles of classical philosophy. Strauss, for instance, maintains that "an adequate understanding of the principles as elaborated by the classics may be an indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of the present-day society in its peculiar character."[2] Hence, for Strauss, classical philosophy, particularly the stream of thought extending from Plato—with his emphasis on the "Guardians" and "Philosopher-Kings"—can, and more appropriately, should, be a guiding spirit for contemporary political theorists, strategists, and American "statesmen" in order to achieve an ideal state for society.

Plato's ideal-state, it should be remembered, is dedicated to the training and perpetuation of a ruling elite who alone incorporated the knowledge of the "good"—and who in turn, were charged in maximizing human perfection by way of the natural polis. Power, authority, and politics would thus converge in the rule of the wise; and as seen in Plato's formulation of a *civilis theologia*, the wise, more often than not, knew what was best for the masses of Athenian society than the masses did themselves—content as they were watching shadows on the wall. Much of the criticism directed at neoconservatives addresses an inherent elitism similar to Plato's Guardians. Neoconservatives, it is

[2] Leo Strauss, *City and Man*, 11.

charged, have taken Strauss's political philosophy to its extremes. Shadia Drury, for instance, writes,

> The devotion of Strauss's followers, coupled with their esotericism, has made him a figure of some controversy. But one thing is clear, Strauss' followers regard U.S. liberalism as the embodiment of the legacy of modernity … and their aim is to rescue the U.S.A. from such modernity. Strauss taught them that this would be possible only if they could win the ear of the powerful, hence their interests in government and public policy. Some find Strauss' elitism disconcerting. An elite that is radical, secretive and duplicitous, an elite that exempts itself from the moral principles it deems applicable to the rest of humanity, cannot be trusted with political power.[3]

In addition, the charged is leveled that Strauss and his followers exemplify a duplicitous façade, given that their revolt against modernity is disingenuous and in reality, embodies the very essence of modernity in that it "follows Machiavelli and Hobbes in making peace, stability, and preservation the supreme end of politics."[4] Moreover Strauss's own political philosophy with its emphasis on esoteric knowledge and the *natural* rule of a philosophic elite can be best described as none other than "Machiavellianism that is well dressed in classical garb."[5] "Peace and concord" in the Straussian formulation, can be understood as the establishment of a distinct version of the truth of society in very much the same sense as in other ideological movements—though Strauss maintains that such peace and stability is necessary for the philosopher to be free to do that which man is endowed by nature to do, that is, to exercise reason.

---

[3] Shadia B. Drury, "Leo Strauss," in E. Craig (Ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1998).

[4] S. B. Drury, "Leo Strauss's Classic Natural Right Teaching," *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Aug., 1987), 311.

[5] Ibid.; See also Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), for a full treatment of the "modern" aspects of Strauss's thought.

GREAT DISRUPTIONS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS

In 1996, Robert H. Bork wrote the following:

> If we slide into a modern, high-tech version of the Dark Ages, we will have done it to ourselves without the assistance of the Germanic tribes that destroyed Roman Civilization. This time we face, and seem to be succumbing to, an attack mounted by a force not only within Western civilization but one that is perhaps its legitimate child.[6]

In the passage, Bork expresses the concern of many contemporary American conservatives, that while the United States withstood the exigencies of the Cold War and the global struggle with communist ideology, it nevertheless continues to confront a serious crisis within, namely an existential crisis associated with "modern liberalism" and its associated "cultural decline." "The enemy within," Bork adds, "is modern liberalism, a corrosive agent carrying a very different mood and agenda than that of classical or traditional liberalism."[7] Modern liberalism, in Bork's assessment, is that form of liberalism that has degenerated from its classical or traditional roots into a contemporary variant based on a radical egalitarianism and a hypersensitive view of tolerance—in other words, a regression from the liberalism of Locke, Adam Smith, Jefferson, Madison, and so forth, toward a continental existentialism of Heidegger, Sartre and the like.[8]

---

[6] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] As we have seen, Strauss's understanding of modernity is one of three waves, the first being relatively benign in its consequences, and the latter two being comprised of the more radical elements including the immanentist movements springing from Rousseauist thought.

Bork's assessment of the contemporary situation in the United States points to the crisis of modernity as indicated by Strauss.[9] Moreover, Bork's assessment comports with Strauss's own admonition:

> This barbarization which we are witnessing and which we continue to witness is not altogether accidental. The intention of the modern development was, of course, to bring about a higher civilization, a civilization that would surpass all earlier civilizations. Yet the effect of the modern development was different. What has taken place in the modern period has been a gradual corrosion and destruction of the heritage of Western civilization.[10]

Examples of reordering in the face of crisis of one type or another, however, abound in history and are not limited to Western civilization or contemporary America. Athens, for instance, was renowned for its cultural contributions to the world; however, the city-state never regained the status it achieved during the time of Pericles following the Peloponnesian War and the social, political, and economic crises that were to follow. Hubris and overextension forced Athens into cultural, as well as strategic and political decline, ending ultimately in Spartan dominance over Athenian political society. In a similar manner, Athens would be enveloped in Alexander's empire as the world of the polis shifted to the cosmopolitan world of ecumenical empire. Rome underwent shifts in its political and social stability as part of its own imperial territorial-expansion and the incorporation of new peoples under the Roman *imperium.* Likewise with the United States and its shift from isolationism to internationalism, over-extension, succeeding waves of immigration, reliance on foreign sources of credit, and so forth.

---

[9] See pp. 36-41 above.

[10] Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 268.

The historical record is replete with the examples of the decadence of political societies—with the rise, maturity, and eventual decline or fall of civilization due to excesses from within. As political theorist Giambattista Vico writes in *The New Science* (1744), "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance."[11] Likewise, the historical literature, from the Bible, to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), to Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), is filled with accounts of the rise and fall of civilizations. Samuel P. Huntington presents this notion exceptionally well in his analysis of historian Arnold Toynbee in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996):

> History ends at least once and occasionally more often in the history of every civilization. As the civilization's universal stage emerges, its people become blinded by what Toynbee called "the mirage of immortality" and convinced that theirs is the final form of human society. So it was with the Roman Empire, the 'Abbasid Caliphate, the Mughal Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The citizens of such universal states "in defiance of apparently plain facts … are prone to regard it, not as a night's shelter in the wilderness, but as the Promised Land, the goal of human endeavors." The same was true at the peak of the Pax Britannica. For the English middle class in 1897, "as they saw it, history for them, was over…And they had every reason to congratulate themselves on the permanent state of felicity which this ending of history had conferred on them." Societies that assume that their history has ended, however, are usually societies whose history is about to decline.[12]

One could plausibly conclude from Toynbee and Huntington's analysis that the process of civilization repeats itself, as necessity once again becomes the driving force to overcome the diminishing returns of fading luxury and leisure—that is, of an opulent,

---

[11] Giambattista Vico. *The New Science,* bk. 1, para. 241 (1744).

[12] Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 301.

commercial, or bourgeois society. Of course the contrast to this form of declinism has been promulgated, namely in the notion that there is a Hegelian "end of history" as publicized by Fukuyama. But such a thesis has yet to be proved out—and more likely than not, never will.

Apart from arguments concerning cycles of historical societies (that is, the birth, maturity, and death of societies), which for all intents and purposes can be taken as a given, the debate over American cultural decline can be understood in terms of the struggle over control concerning the truth of American society. This struggle can be recognized in the conflict over the control of some of America's foremost socializing institutions, namely its educational institutions. These institutions, historically, have been instrumental in forming and shaping a particular personality type that mirrors the society in which they are formed—e.g., the old notion of the polis as man writ large. Allan Bloom, for instance, writes, "every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain and that informs its curriculum. It wants to create a certain kind of human being."[13] Just what type of human being is to be formed and shaped takes on added meaning. "Always important is the political regime," Bloom adds, "which needs citizens who are in accord with its fundamental principle."[14] In this sense, American decline can be understood as the failure of American educational institutions to form an American character in accord with its fundamental principles or truths. For Bloom, the traditional American character morphed into worldly character, an "old view" versus a "new view," with the new appearing to be historically determined—that is, a product of the later

[13] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 26;

[14] Ibid.

waves of modernity. This has led to a shifting consciousness of "what it means to be an American." According to Bloom, "The old view was that, by recognizing and accepting man's natural rights, men found a fundamental basis of unity and sameness."[15] But liberalism's aim is to deconstruct the old, and in its place, design new, more progressive structures and institutions. As Bloom adds:

> The recent education of openness has rejected all that [i.e. natural rights and revelation]. It pays no attention to natural rights or the historical origins of our regime, which are now thought to be flawed and regressive. It is progressive and forward-looking. … It is open to all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies. There is no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything.[16]

The slouch toward Gomorrah, the cresting of the later waves of modernity onto American political society, for Bloom, as with other Straussians, thus begins on the heels of education—or the lack of proper education—and extends into the formation of an individual no longer in tune with the traditional principles of the American character.

These American reactionaries to modernity, that is, those advocating and prescribing specific guidelines and procedures to offset the impact of modernity, seek to mend the social fabric of society by formulating a specific socio-political agenda to stave off American decline. In doing so, they embark on the endeavor, perhaps consciously, but then again, perhaps not, to construct a neo-Platonic civil theology for the masses of American society adrift in the swells of modernity. An essential part of this project is to construct an ideal-type of individual, much like the work initiated by Plato and Aristotle. Hence, Bloom's work on the American university can be seen as part of a larger

---

[15] Ibid., 27.

[16] Ibid.

enterprise engendered by Strauss: a project to cultivate a specific "cultured" human being. Strauss for instance writes:

> Liberal education is education in culture or toward culture. The finished product of a liberal education is a cultured human being. … "Culture" means derivatively and today chiefly the cultivation of the mind, the taking care and improving of the native faculties of the mind in accordance of the nature of the mind. Just as the soil needs cultivators of the soil, the mind needs teachers."[17]

One is reminded of Plato's construction of a civil theology for the masses of Athenian society for the purpose of setting the populace in their proper place within society and society within a larger framework of universal order. Hence it is proper to return to Voegelin's analysis and to gain a better understanding of one the great attempts to create a new idea of man, a new truth of human existence, and its embodiment in a concrete human society, specifically Voegelin's interpretation of Hobbes; for it is Hobbes who stands as modernity's great contriver of a civil theology and the model by which to judge recent endeavors.

HOBBES AND THE FORMATION OF AN ENGLISH CIVIL THEOLOGY

Voegelin's analysis of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* reveals Hobbes's intention of establishing Christianity, a supernatural theology or *theologia surpernaturalis*, as the civil theology (*theologia civilis*) for eighteenth-century English political society.[18] To accomplish this task, Hobbes must, in effect, significantly curtail some of Christianity purely religious dimensions. Hobbes's intention, moreover, must be understood chiefly as the response to the turmoil of the Puritan crisis and the English Revolution. Such a

[17] Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 3.

[18] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 211ff and 233ff.

project is in itself no small undertaking given English society's Christian roots. Christianity, in essence, has an other-worldly focus, so how to utilize Christianity for merely mundane "peace and concord" requires a unique justification.

As we have seen, Christianity did serve this function in Western civilization under St. Augustine's dual-system of representation, a system that atrophied toward the end of the Middle Ages. As Voegelin writes,

> Christianity had left in its wake the vacuum of a de-divinized natural sphere of political existence. In the concrete situation of the late Roman Empire and early Western political foundations, this vacuum did not become a major source of troubles as long as the myth of the empire was not seriously disturbed by the consolidation of national realms and as long as the church was the predominant civilizing factor in the evolution of Western society, so that Christianity in fact could function as a civil theology. As soon, however, as a certain point of civilizational saturation was reached, when centers of lay culture formed at the courts and in the cities, when competent lay personnel increased in royal administrations and city governments, it became abundantly clear that the problems of a society in historical existence were not exhausted by waiting for the end of the world.[19]

Hence, the scramble within Western political thinking to fill the vacuum left by Augustine's philosophy of history with the "incipient formation of a Western civil theology." Hobbes represents then, an initial modern attempt to cope with the social disruption brought about by the atrophy of a functional civil theology (i.e., Christianity under the Augustinian system) and the unique effort to reconstruct society in league with a new, modern truth concerning mankind's existence.

Christianity, as formulated by the Church fathers (*Patres*), was built on the work of Greek philosophy and represented a new truth and a new source of order for human societies superior in rank to the order and truth of existing societies—that is, those

[19] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 220-221.

ancient societies built on the compact experiences of rite and myth. In addition, Christianity's new source of order brought with it the correlated universal community of mankind, a brotherhood of equals, bound together by ties beyond mere civil society—the ultimate open society, so to speak, based not simply on an "unseen measure," but on a very real measure, "the word made flesh." To accomplish his intention, Voegelin argues, Hobbes had to construct a civil society in which citizens are in accord with the fundamental principles of a nascent, yet emerging opulent and commercial society, yet beholden to a significant degree on Christianity. Voegelin, it is to be remembered, posits an intractable conflict between philosophical truth and the truth of society. Hobbes appears to have had a keen insight into the direction English political society was heading, and in this sense, Hobbes had to construct a new type of man in accord with a new type of society—and its concomitant "truth." This is in keeping with Strauss's "cultured human being" and Bloom's contention that every political regime needs citizens who are in accord with its "fundamental principle." Hobbes recognized the crisis of his time: that religious passions threatened the peace and concord of English political society. "Hobbes tried to meet the danger," Voegelin adds, "by devising a civil theology that made the order of a society in existence the truth that it represented—and by the side of this truth no other should be held."

Hobbes's project is no less than a construction of a theory of representation. Hobbes's political society will be an ordered society, but not necessarily one based *entirely* on some notion of an ordered cosmion. Hobbes's lowered the sights of political theory in very much a Machiavellian sense in that representation and virtue do not, and more importantly should not, represent some form of transcendental truth. According to

Voegelin, Hobbes was faced with the following predicament: (1) there exists a political society that wants to maintain order in the face of an existential crisis—i.e., the Puritan crisis; and (2) there exists a faction in the political community who want to alter the social order in the name of a *new truth*. Hobbes solved the conflict by the resolution that there is no truth except the rule of peace and concord in political society—any opinion or doctrine not conducive to order is thereby untruth and subject to proscription or regulation by the state.[20] For Hobbes, it was a passion-driven, factional Christianity that threatened the peace and concord of English political society; nevertheless, given Christianity's stature in Western Civilization, it was probably inevitable that Hobbes chose it to serve as the civil theology.

To achieve his purpose, Voegelin argues, Hobbes simply conflates Christianity with the "law of nature" so as individuals can go about the pursuit of individually chosen notions of worldly happiness without any conflicts of interests with their peers. Christianity's utility lies in its ability to regulate behavior. As such, the soteriological truth of Christianity is less important than its derivative function of pacifying and mollifying human passions. The "dictate of reason," understood as a "law of nature" predisposes the individual to peace and conformity under a civil order. Such a dictate, however, is essentially powerless unless it was to obtain a degree of transcendent power binding citizen to state. As Voegelin states, "the dictate of reason … would be no more than a theorem without obligatory force unless it were understood as the hearing of the word of God; only in so far as the dictate of reason is believed to be a divine command is

[20] Ibid., 212ff.

it a law of nature."[21] Finally, this law of nature has no actual positive expression until it is embodied in a concrete political society—in Hobbes's case, by way of social contract. It is in this sense that Hobbes's system of representation is also a civil theology for his English society. "The Law of Nature, and the Civill Law," writes Hobbes, "contain each other, and are of equal extent. … For it is the sovereign power that obliges men to obey them."[22] Or in Voegelin's analysis, "Only when they have covenanted to submit to a common sovereign [i.e., the representative of existential order], has the law of nature actually become the law of a society in historical existence.[23]

Hobbes mythological contrivance fits in with MacIver's analysis of the function of myth (as discussed in the Introduction), that is to say, as the "value-impregnated beliefs and notions that men hold, that they live by or live for."[24] Indeed, Hobbes attempts to consciously shape the beliefs and the values that individuals hold, live by and live for. What is more, in a very real sense, Hobbes attempts to create new type of human personality, or what Voegelin describes as the "new idea of man"—a man beyond mere anthropological and soteriological truth, but rather, an understanding of man as the embodiment of modernity (that is, beyond philosophical truth and the truth of Christianity). Hobbes was the purveyor of this new truth. As Voegelin writes, Hobbes "saw himself in the role of a Plato, in quest of a king who would adopt the new truth and

---

[21] Ibid., 212.

[22] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 26, p. 314.

[23] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 213.

[24] See pp. 16-21 above.

indoctrinate the people with it. The education of the people was an essential part of his program."[25]

Hobbes's new idea of man is the vision of mankind in which a purpose beyond mundane existence is all but denied; this includes Plato's anthropological principle, Aristotle's teleological principle, Stoicism's *Logos*, and Christianity's transcendent perfection. Rather, the peaceful pursuit of individually chosen modes of happiness is promulgated by Hobbes as the sole consideration of individuals as they enter into civil association—modes of happiness that are necessarily materialistic in orientation. If any supernatural perfection of man indeed exists it is to be relegated to that of personal and private beliefs and, more importantly, kept at a relatively safe distance from civil relations. Moreover, Hobbes the psychologist identifies human passions as the primary motivating factor in humans, the most intolerable of which is the religious passion—such passions were seen to have been a primary cause leading to the social upheavals of his time, namely, the Puritans. Thus, Hobbes tames the passionate aspects of Christianity by subjecting its content and truth to the sovereign political representative, combining the law of nature with the civil law, and establishing an education system to inculcate a new myth into the minds of the young. Hobbes's project represents the contrivance of a civil theology for English society, a new truth, a new myth, and ultimately, a new direction for humanity due to the influence of Hobbes's theory of representation. Hobbes's object is an organic truth, recognizing that a long time after men have began to organize into Commonwealths, such political societies were "imperfect and apt to relapse into disorder." Hobbes's single-minded intention then, was the project by which "there may

[25] Ibid., 218.

Principles of Reason be found out, by industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting by externall violence) everlasting."[26]

Accordingly, one can summarize Hobbes's construction as follows: an everlasting constitution of human society requires a sovereign and a state that humbles human pride. Such a state-society rapport reveals the articulation of a new type of society, a new type of man, and a civil theology constructed from the barebones of Christianity—albeit Christianity stripped of its Puritanical, immanentist tendencies. Hobbes's Sovereign is the sole "pastor" of the people; and the degree to which both people and society represent some higher purpose is the degree to which the Sovereign decrees it.[27] The truth of society, however, remains the same: it is that truth in which what is best for society is none other than that truth which supports the continued existence of society through the securing of "peace and concord"—and again, this is so generally in the face of competing and potentially destabilizing conceptions of truth.

THE FUNCTION AND ROLE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION

Hobbes, as with Plato, recognized the need for a civil theology as essential to social order. *Leviathan* can be understood as the great treatise of modern Western political thought clarifying this point. But what can be said of the more recent American

[26] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 30, p. 378.

[27] A central theme to the *Leviathan* is the role of the "Pastor" and the pastoral imagery associated with the Sovereign. Indeed, Hobbes's theological treatise in the later chapters of Leviathan bring this point home: "The Doctors of the Church are called Pastors; so also are Civill Soveraigns: but if Pastors be not subordinate one to another, so as that there may be one chief pastor, men will be taught contrary Doctrines, whereof both may be, and one must be, false. Who that one chief pastor is, according to the law of Nature, hath been already shown; namely, that it is the Civill Soveraign: and to whom the Scripture hath assigned that office, we shall see in the chapters following", *Leviathan*, chap. 29, p. 499.

case? Can any similar project be discerned in the American experience? For conservative thinkers, the United States is experiencing a crisis of significant proportions. While the threat may not be as apparent as in Hobbes's case, it is, nevertheless, an existential crisis. Accordingly, it can be argued: (1) there exists a group or a faction within political society that wants to maintain order in the face of an existential crisis—i.e., the "crisis of modernity" or the moral relativism and nihilism that is propelling the United States toward a "modern, high-tech version of the Dark Ages"; (2) this group wants to *maintain* social order in the name of an older, more traditional truth—a harkening back to the good old days, so to speak; and (3), there exists an attempt by this very same group to solve this crisis by the resolution that there is a fundamental truth that was embodied in the American founding period, and, while not exemplifying theoretical perfection, this embodiment was nonetheless a practically functional order, particularly when compared with ideological alternatives engendered by the modern era. This truth, this truth of society, is exemplified in the American civil religion. And while this group might not refer to it as such, their project proceeds along the lines pioneered first by Plato, and later by Hobbes. But an essential problem remains. As we have discussed, within American political thought there can be discerned two rival understanding of what America *is,* or more appropriately, what type of regime the United States embodies. That is to say, there exists a tension between a classical republicanism of the colonial and early Founding period, and the modern, liberal state that emerged after the Framing period. If civil religion is essential to order, what type of regime is inherent in the United States makes all the difference.

Robert Bellah asks the following question that follows along the lines of the Voegelin's analysis of Hobbes: "Could there be a sense in which the American republic … is after all, a Christian republic, or should I say a biblical republic, in which biblical religion is indeed the civil religion?"[28] And it may be added, is it possible to make such a civil religion a reality if such an articulation is partial, and not yet entirely complete?

As Bellah maintains, "the American solution to the problem of church and state is unprecedented, unique, and confused." It follows that the dichotomy between republic and liberal state determines the functionality of civil religion itself. It can also be adduced, that the United States may indeed manifest some combination of both classical political theorizing and modern liberal thought. This "unclarity" concerning regime-type clouds the minds of many Americans. Bellah rightly argues that a balancing between the two obtains in the American experience; that is, "we wanted to have our cake and it eat too, to retain the *rhetoric* and spirit of a republic in the political structure of a liberal constitutional state (emphasis mine)."[29] Under a classical republican regime, civil religion is essential; the state reinforces and sustains republican values by way of upholding key social institutions, such as spiritual and religious institutions (churches), the sacramental aspects of the family, and key educational institutions. Moreover, politics under a republican regime is, in a very real sense, the authoritative allocation of values, albeit the values are brought about in a positive fashion and not merely predicated upon coercion. As with the notion of the polis as man written large, so the republic. In this sense, the state must be an ethical entity unto itself—to be seen as embodying an

[28] Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 6.

[29] Ibid., 8.

ethos or fundamental values—and in turn, is responsible for socializing these values into its citizens. In the American case, these values stand clear in the claim to *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (a New Order of the Ages). And as Voegelin's posits in his third level of representation, the republic tends to symbolize and embody the ultimate order of existence. "Such symbolization," concurs Bellah, "may be nothing more than the worship of the republic itself as the highest good [as with the Roman *imperium*], or it may be, as in the American case, the worship of a higher reality that upholds the standards the republic attempts to embody."[30] Accordingly, being in harmony with higher reality brings with it such notions of *Annuit Cœptis,* covenantal aspirations, and also the danger of political messianism.

Contrary to its nature and function within a republican regime, civil religion within a liberal-constitutional regime is of dubious value—if it can even be said to exist at all. The state, under a liberal regime, is a "purely neutral legal mechanism without purposes or values" with its citizens, now understood in terms of Hobbes's new personality type, free to pursue material passions within a minimum framework of law. The state's primary function, then, is merely to protect the rights of individuals, not to be a "school of virtue"—with modern natural rights, as Leo Strauss calls attention to, being distinguished from classical natural right.[31] Religion, beyond the minimum dogma of the sparse abstract tenets of American civil religion is confined to private, personal beliefs. Religion in the modern liberal society, as with Hobbes and Locke's formulation, is reduced to "voluntary associations" in the private sphere. Furthermore, as Kristol points

[30] Ibid., 13.

[31] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 120ff. and 165ff.

out, liberal capitalism, the logical outcome of early modern political thought, while vastly increasing material wealth and extending the notion of freedom, made short work of any lingering spiritual affinities.

As we have seen, societies abhor the vacuum of a defunct civil theology and, quite naturally, make a concerted effort to fill this vacuum. In the American case, secularization never reached critical levels so as to completely relegate religion to the private sphere. The public sphere always contained a religious dimension. Hence, at least during the early decades of the republic, no vacuum ensued. And whereas other political societies succumbed to contrived constructions built on a minimum dogma or the various immanentist movements, the United States remained remarkably free from such tendencies. The United States, it will be recalled, can be understood to have been constituted as a political society during the first wave of modernity, prior to the formulation and dissemination of the more radical waves of human creativity. Moreover, American social, economic and political institutions developed at such a pace and at such a period in Western development so as to preclude the drift into full-scale immanentist movements.[32]

Herein lies the American uniqueness. Bellah argues that in regard to the American civil religion (traditionally understood), the public sphere contains religious aspects, albeit aspects in which the tenets are sparse and abstract (i.e., its formal qualities) and have no sanctioned support in the legal and constitutional order (i.e., its marginal

---

[32] It is generally accepted that societies experiencing revolutions and industrial development at later stages tended to display such immanentist tendencies; for instance, the French, Russian, and National Socialist Revolutions all revolutions and industrialization at later stages of modernity, as opposed to Great Britain and the United States which experienced their revolutions and industrialization at an earlier stage.

quality). Hence, the "traditional" civil religion requires the supplement of a "public theology" to ground society in its purposes and values. In other words, the public beliefs, symbols, and rituals that add a religious dimension to the *public sphere* are only functional to a certain extent; ultimately in a free society private beliefs must attain an active quality and engender participation in the communal religious experience lest society drift into Voegelin's gnostic dream-world of immanentist movements. With the sparseness and abstractness of the American civil religion and with the lack of any sanctioned legal support, the public theology, due to its active quality, serves to reinforce the republican values vital to the social and political health of the American people. As Bellah explains,

> The liberal regime never repudiated the civil religion that was already inherent in the Declaration of Independence and indeed kept it alive in our political life even though the Constitution was silent about it. From the point of view of the legal regime, however, any further *elaboration* of religious symbolism beyond that of the formal and marginal civil religion was purely private. From the point of view of the national community … such *elaboration* was public even though lacking any legal status. Here we can speak of public theology in distinction to civil religion (emphasis mine).[33]

Alexis de Tocqueville speaks of this quality as one of the strengths of American political society, in that the newly arrived English brought with them to the New World a distinct religious experience, "a form of Christianity which I can only describe as democratic and republican."[34] Tocqueville adds, "From the start, politics and religion were in agreement and they have continued to be ever since."[35] This is a far cry from saying that politics and religion are one in the same; rather, agreement implies support, particularly the

---

[33] Ibid., 13-14.

[34] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 336.

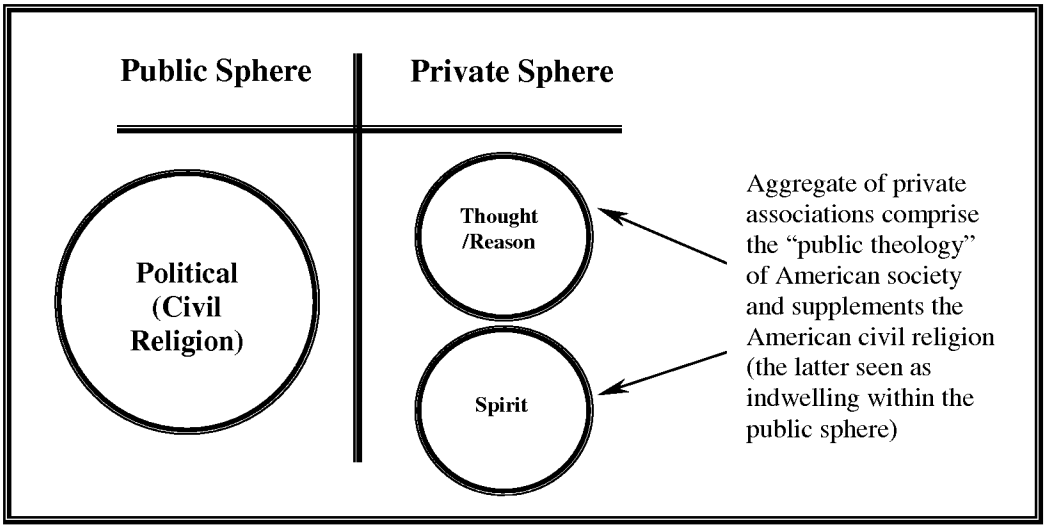
[35] Ibid.

mutual support inherent within the classical republican stream of thought between state and society, public and private life. Tocqueville explains the relation in this way: "Religion, which never interferes directly in the government of Americans, should therefore be regarded as the first of their political institutions, for, if it does give them the taste for liberty, it enables them to take unusual advantage of it."[36] Liberty, in this sense, is not to be confused with license, but rather, liberty is to be practiced within a meaningful moral framework.

In this way, the traditional American civil religion—understood as the public beliefs, symbols, and rituals that add a religious dimension to the public sphere and politics—is functionally related to America's private religious experiences, experiences that have developed historically since the early Puritan period (see Figure 2). As such, the civil religion is able to its function as a barrier to radical notions of human creativity while discouraging corruption by way of its reinforcement of republican virtues—in that the republican regime has its ethical, educational, and even spiritual roles, and its very survival is linked to its role of reproducing republican citizens.

[36] Ibid., 342.

Figure 2: Civil Religion, Public Theology and the Republican Regime



Accordingly, while maintaining a semblance of "separation of church and state," public and private, and so forth, state and society are united in an organic fashion, each of which bolsters the viability of the political society as a whole. The civil religion tempers the excesses of the private religious elements, while the private religious associations provide some degree of action, a *vita activa*, that allow republican traditions to survive and thrive in an active political community, primarily by way of the socialization process.

Under the republican regime, the regime that did in fact characterize the American political system prior to, and in the several decades following the ratification of the Constitution, the American civil religion could be understood as an organic outgrowth—an outgrowth essential for the fusing of state and society and essential for the bolstering the virtues necessary for the viability of a *meaningful* political community; that is, a community that embodies a total "way of life."[37] The interrelation of Calvinism and

[37] This is in keeping with Aristotle's contention that the state is a work of nature, "the city exists by nature, and that a human being is by nature a political animal," *Politics*, bk. 1 chapter 2, 1253a; or as in Burke's organic analogy: "…by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we

classicism, as proposed by Schlesinger and inherent in the notion of America's experimental character, thus grounded the United States in a normative order of a unique nature and function. The essentially negative aspects of Calvinism—namely the precariousness of life and the futility of human contrivance—along with the positive aspects of Providence, predestination, and divine calling, are wedded to a classical understanding of an objective, normative order and the fundamental importance given to civic virtue and civic association. Nevertheless, while the residual elements of this older civil religion remained, the symbols contained therein came under intense pressure with the succeeding waves of modernity. With the growth of the liberal state with its emphasis on the clear and uncompromising distinction between state and society and the separation of church and state, along with the elevation of the value of neutrality and the notion that American political society should not embody any one particular way of life, a new regime supplanted the old republican one to a significant degree—and in this way, society became fragmented among a number of subjective "lifestyles," while individually chosen paths to happiness were held, in theory, to aggregate into the "good" society.

Consequently, the liberal state introduces difficulties concerning both the nature and function of the American civil religion. To the extent that the liberal order leads to the atrophy of America's older civil religion, the contrivance of an American civil religion to fill this vacuum becomes an absolute necessity. In other words, whereas under a republican regime the American civil religion could be understood as developing organically, with state and society, politics and religion, public and private, forming an

---

improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete", *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 98.

organic whole, the emergence and very success of the modern liberal state required the contrivance of a civil theology to give meaning to the members of an increasingly individualistic society. As Irving Kristol explains, liberalism's economic system, capitalism, delivered the goods when it came to material wealth and individual freedom; however, it failed to bring meaning and purpose to the "inner," private aspects of the individual's life and a general lack of congruence with the "outer," public life. Hence, the spiritual vacuum in the American experience. Since it is recognized that a political society cannot exist without a fundamental system of normative symbols—or as an ordered "cosmion" in Voegelin's term—theorists in the liberal state are baited into ideological constructions to fill the needed for symbolic meaning. And as our analysis has indicated, much of this effort can be understood as the need to contrive a civil theology to fill vacuity created by the secularization and "enlightenment" of modern societies. Similarly, since the very nature of liberal state questions whether there ought to be, or indeed, can be, a civil religion for a liberal political society, systematic attempts, much like the attempts of the early liberal period—e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau—were contrived to fill the vacuum of a spiritually void public sphere on up through the twentieth century. Neoconservatives in the United States sought to fill this spiritual void by reviving the myth of America, an America which was afforded a divinely inspired destiny: that the United States occupied a unique place in history; that the United States was a uniquely virtuous nation and represented forces of good; that the American nation stood in the vanguard in the epic struggle against evil; and that the United States was the one nation still capable of restoring virtue's lost loveliness, both at home and abroad. This involved transforming not only American society, but the world as a whole. To

what extent this can be said to reflect the current American experience is where we must now turn, particularly to understand whether the United States displays some of the immanentist tendencies of other twentieth-century ideological movements and if so, how this development came to pass.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NEW CIVIL THEOLOGY: IMMANENTISM BY ANOTHER NAME?

> In this situation there is a glimmer of hope, for the American and English democracies, which most solidly in their institutions represent the truth of the soul, are, at the same time existentially the strongest powers. But it will require all our efforts to kindle this glimmer into a flame by repressing gnostic corruption and restoring the forces of civilization. At present the fate is in the balance.
>
> —Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*

Hobbes, we have seen, recognized the need for a civil theology beyond doubt for English society. But whereas Hobbes contrived a civil theology based on Christianity, albeit a Christianity stripped of its immanentist implications, the current trend among conservative thinkers in the United States appears to be one in which the attempt is made to adapt Christianity (or Judeo-Christianity) as an America civil theology. Whether intentional or not, however, the immanentist implications of this popularized Christianity remain fully intact. The overriding theme in this agenda remains ameliorating the impact of modernity on American society. And the primary actors driving this agenda continue to be those American conservative elites seeking to temper the effects of the modern pathology. Yet, as has been argued here, that while attempting to craft a civil theology that at first glance would appear to be an attempt to restoration the older, "traditional" American civil religion, in reality, the project engendered by these American conservatives proved to be none other than the establishment of an orthodoxy of a

sectarian Protestant community, a sectarianism tilted, so to speak, toward the radical elements of Christian eschatology. This "tilt," in turn, has opened up immanentist possibilities for American political society. Part of this trend can be explained by what Arthur Schlesinger refers to the lack of historical consciousness on the part of Americans. Nevertheless, two additional factors can be identified as having played a significant part in this immanentist development, namely, political opportunism and the rise of the Christian Right to prominence in American politics, and the current state of global affairs in which American post-Cold War hegemony is under strain. In the former, a *de facto* alliance can be discerned as developing between neoconservative political theorists and evangelical Christians with the ostensible goal of restoring a perceived traditional view of American society; while the latter indicates a shift from a foreign policy based on the *realpolitik* of the late-Cold War era toward a radically idealistic policy agenda, part of a policy inclination dating back to the Reagan Administration. The confluence of these factors exasperated the trend in the direction of a highly activist American policy agenda and the immanentist implications involved both at home and abroad—that is, the attempt to impose sectarian beliefs as a state cult.

THEORIES OF AMERICA: EXPERIMENT OR DESTINY?

A lack of historical consciousness has, no doubt, contributed to the problems associated with the great political societies of the past; upon careful reflection, it can be argued that the United States has not escaped this exigency. In *The Cycles of American History* (1986), Arthur Schlesinger articulates two competing theories of America and their significance in explaining the intentions of the Founders—as well their adequacy in

interpreting the historicity of the United States. These "theories" of America, namely, the competing ideas of (1) America as a mere socio-political "experiment," or (2) America as the concrete manifestation of divine intervention, or "destiny," are two suppositions regarding the nature of American political society in historical existence. Moreover, this analysis follows Voegelin's in that it draws attention to that which illuminates American society from within, shaping and imparting America's existential and transcendental representation respectively. Such notions concerning the "theory" of America are helpful in assessing the general drift of the United States from its older civil religious tradition toward a more radical manifestation. Specifically, the understanding of "America as experiment" is one that tends to temper some of the excesses that have reared up from time to time when "America as destiny," that is, American exceptionalism, gained traction in the American political consciousness.

It is important to point out that both theories of America have their origins in the Calvinist theology. The impact of this ethos on America's Puritan founders cannot be overemphasized. Calvinistic thought emphasizes predestination, the sovereignty of God, the supreme authority of the Scriptures, and the irresistibility of grace. Calvinism later became infused with such notions of the depravity of man, the precariousness of human existence, the vanity of humanity under a wrathful and vengeful deity, and the ever-present threat of hell and eternal damnation facing humans. "So terrible a sense of the nakedness of the human condition," was manifest in the Calvinistic ethos, that it "turned all life into an endless and implacable process of testing."[1] In this sense, Calvinism

[1] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 4.

served to temper the hubris of unconstrained human desire, revealing a "universal law" imposed on collective behavior. As Schlesinger adds:

> Were the American colonists immune to the universal law? In this aspect, the Calvinistic notion of "providential history" argued against American exceptionalism.

On the other hand, despite its rather bleak outlook, Calvinism contains tenets that informed the American political society with purpose and meaning, namely in the notions of *Providence*, or God's care, provision, and foresight. Such notions have given rise to an understanding of a direction to the created universe in such a way that the universe as a whole and the individual creatures within it fulfill God's purpose. In a similar way, these ideas were transformed to America itself. Yet providential history did not necessarily indicate providential blessing:

> The idea of "providential history" supposed that all secular communities were finite and problematic; all flourished and all decayed; all had beginning and an end. For Christians this idea had it locus classicus in Augustine's great attempt to solve the problem of the decline and fall of Rome—the problem that more than any other transfixed the serious historical minds of the west for thirteen centuries after the appearance of *The City of God*.[2]

Both of these notions, predestination and providence, have thus far played a significant role in the purpose and values of the American nation. Nevertheless, the specter of Rome hung over the American undertaking. Rome proved that no human city is "eternal." Hence, escaping the classical fate became an overriding concern for America's early statesmen.

The tenets of Calvinism, moreover, extend to the individual, or the notion that each individual in society has a *calling*, and the dignity of each occupation—not just that

---

[2] Ibid., 4.

of the clergy—is seen as service to God. Both of these theories, according to Schlesinger, were renewed by secular infusions—that is, the intensity of the Calvinistic doctrine became less intense with the political articulation and economic and social success of the colonies. Moreover, the Enlightenment's emphasis on science, reason and inductive knowledge over that of revealed or esoteric knowledge tempered the excesses of the biblical tradition. Both theories eventually solidified around a core set of beliefs with renewed vigor and emotive appeal and remain in open competition for the "hearts and minds" of the American people—and by extension, shape and determine events, policies, and attitudes across the globe. America's culture wars can be understood to a significant degree as an identity crisis between America as an experiment in classical republicanism and America's manifest destiny.[3] Hence a clearer understanding of these two theories is essential for a greater understanding of American civil religion.

"America as experiment" is built on the notion that the Founding Founders understood well the seriousness of their "singular adventure—the adventure of a republic." Schlesinger refers to this theme as America's governmental "Tradition," the nexus of classicism and Calvinism. Noting the ill fate of the classical Greek and Roman republics, the Founders understood the difficulties of perpetuating a republican system of government, thus taking careful note in the lessons of the past in framing a new political and social order. Rome, in particular, served as both a benchmark and warning, witnessed in its glory, hubris, and ultimate disaster. As Schlesinger writes, "the Founding Fathers passionately ransacked the classical historians for ways to escape the

[3] Cf. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991) 52-58.

classical fate. … One cannot easily overstate the anxiety that attended this search [for surety] or the relevance [the Founding Fathers] found in the ancient texts."[4] Hence, the Founders conceived their project for a new government as an ongoing experiment in government, with the American experiment subject to the same fate of the past republics and open to the same decay associated with the vicissitudes of time.

The "Tradition" according to Schlesinger, initially sprang from "historic Christianity as mediated by Augustine and Calvin." Calvin's original doctrines had, by the time of the colonization of New England, developed into a comprehensive belief system in several Protestant countries, affecting the social, political, ethical, and theological aspects of life and thought. The New England Puritans, in particular, laid claim to such notions of providence, predestination, and one's personal calling when constructing their own colonial governments. But by the time of the Founding Fathers and the movement toward independence, and in the *tradition* carefully being crafted by such astute minds as Jefferson, Adams, and Madison, the focus was not so much on America's special place in history, but rather, on the pragmatic realization that all human conventions are subject to decline and failure—that is, Calvinism's emphasis on human fallibility and the precariousness of human existence. Hence, Calvinism remained a salient feature of American political thought long after the full impact of the Enlightenment and the articulation of a distinct American national political society.

A second phase in the development of the "Tradition" can be discerned in the intense focus by the Founders on Classical theorists from the Roman period—e.g., Polybius, Plutarch, Cicero, Tacitus, etc. Moreover, the Classical indoctrination

---

[4] Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 6.

reinforced the Calvinistic ethos in that history does not reveal human progress to be inevitable—that is, it distinguishes the impermanence of republics and the transience of glory, and finally, the mutability in all human constructions. Hence, in regard to the classical republics, Schlesinger reminds us, "in the fullness of time, power and luxury inexorably brought corruption and decay."[5] The "Machiavellian moment" is the rule, not the exception. Hence, the legacy of Ancient Greece and Rome frames American political thought, while the stern caveats of Calvinist doctrine impresses a negative worldview on those charged with constructing a more perfect union, based on, however imperfectly, "self-evident" truths. Thus, a guiding the principle of the American "experiment" is the need to escape the fate of the Classical republics along with the persistent reminder of Calvinism of the precariousness of life itself.

According to Schlesinger, the alternative theory of America, the "Counter-Tradition," evolved in the subsequent years of the early republic, taking on mystical aspects, and explained the American nation and people in terms of divine destiny—namely, that the United States holds a special place in the history of the world, representing a New Israel, and a new promise for all mankind.[6] Moreover, rather than a republic cultivating virtue in its citizens, the United States came to be seen as *embodying* virtue. A lack of historical consciousness, according to Schlesinger, left a vacuum in the consciousness of the generations following the Founders, a consciousness originally informed by the experimental tradition. This is illustrated by a general drift in society and even academia, as "the young no longer study history [and] academics turn their

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 14-19.

backs on history in favor of the ahistorical behavioral 'sciences.'"[7] "As the American historical consciousness thinned out," Schlesinger explains, "the messianic hope has flowed into the vacuum. And as Christianity turned liberal, shucking off such cardinal doctrines as original sin, one more impediment was removed to belief in national virtue and perfectibility."[8] More contemporary experiences heightened this shift in consciousness, namely the growth in American wealth and power, along with the sudden insertion of the United States into world affairs following the Second World War. Hence, experiment was eclipsed by destiny, and for some theorists, the end of the Cold War translated into the end of history as such.

For the succeeding generations no longer completely in touch with their historical roots, the United States, then, came to be deemed a nation of the elect; a new beacon of hope for the oppressed nations of the earth, a shining city set on a hill. "The Kingdom of God," in the words of Schlesinger, "was deemed both immanent in time and immanent in America."[9] Hence, under this theory, the United States is considered a redemptive nation, and the instrument of a redemptive divine entity, brought about at a specific time, at a specific place, and by a specific people, for a specific purpose. As Schlesinger adds, "The fact that God had withheld America for so long—until the Reformation purified the church, until the printing press spread Scripture among the people—argued that He had been saving the new land for some ultimate manifestation of His grace."[10] And as Christ signified the perfection of the human individual—the

---

[7] Ibid., 17.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 15.

[10] Ibid.

word made flesh—the new nation was "certainly part, perhaps the climax, of redemptive history; America was divine history fulfilled."[11]

The political messianism inherent in such beliefs is by no means limited to the United States; as Voegelin's analysis indicates, such beliefs have existed, and often much more intensely, in other societies. However, in the United States, messianism has taken on an air of urgency, particularly in the service of securing global peace and concord.[12] The end of the Cold War and America's "unipolar moment," for instance, exacerbated this trend. Following the Cold War, the United States stood at the brink, in the words of some theorists, of a "new world order" and the "end of history." Such "endisms" however, belie the realities of the global situation. As Samuel P. Huntington observes, "in the past few years the United States has, among other things, attempted or been perceived as attempting more or less unilaterally to do the following:"

> pressure other countries to adopt American values and practices regarding human rights and democracy; prevent other countries from acquiring military capabilities that could counter American conventional superiority; enforce American law extraterritorially in other societies; grade countries according to their adherence to American standards on human rights, drugs, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, missile proliferation, and now religious freedom; apply sanctions against countries that do not meet American standards on these issues; promote American corporate interests under the slogan of free trade and open markets; shape the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to serve these same corporate interests; intervene in local conflicts in which it has relatively little direct interest; bludgeon other countries to adopt economic policies and social policies that will benefit American economic interests … and categorize certain countries as "rogue states" [or later, as part of the "Axis of Evil"], excluding them from global institutions because they refuse to kowtow to American wishes.[13]

---

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78, (March/April 1999), 35-49.

[13] Ibid., 38.

The rise of American global consciousness increased with the growth of the American liberal state, and along with the growth in American wealth and power, the temptation was put before the American nation to attempt to impose its sectarian beliefs on the world at large. The American republican experiment could not survive in this globalizing environment; it too suffered from the experiential atrophy that so many other classical republics were confronted with. Destiny remained a convenient truth in which to fall back on.

So it can be argued, that with the waning of classical republicanism and the waxing of the liberal-state, a loss of historical consciousness can be discerned as symptomatic of greater social malaise. And with the pluralism of values concerning the "higher" ends of society characteristic of liberal societies—that is, those ends beyond the rational pursuit of self-interests— and with multiculturalism dominating the agendas at both the national and sub-national levels, a normative vacuum opened, which by the mid-1950's, began to whitewash all but the most visible vestiges of the American republican tradition. Various attempts were made to shore up the waning tradition. "In God We Trust" was designated the U.S. national motto by Congress in 1956 and has been included on U.S. currency. The phrase "One nation under God" was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance to indicate America's God-fearing status in relation to the godless Soviet Union. Bellah points out that "the addition of the phrase 'under God' to the pledge of allegiance in the 1950's was an indication of the erosion of the tradition, not because it was an innovation but because it arose from the need to make explicit what had for generations been taken for granted."[14]

[14] Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 168-169.

RADICAL PROTESTANTISM AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM

The incorporation of a popularized Christianity into the political platform of the Republican Party, while on the surface a practical move intended to garner a Republican majority across the board, can, nevertheless, be understood as a minor aspect of a much larger civil theological construction. Neoconservatives, for example, recognized the utility of Christianity in the overall conservative scheme. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge observe:

> You might think that, as secular intellectuals, the neocons would find this eschatological brew a bit strong for their taste, and that, as Jews, they would balk at being assigned a bit role in the Christian revelation. But the neocons have always been remarkably good a biting their lips on these subjects, treating Christian fundamentalism as something of a Straussian "noble myth"—it might be nonsense, but it advances the conservative cause.[15]

Hence, an alliance of sorts was initiated between these two groups, ostensibly in the name of securing what was construed to be the "traditional" public order.

But while conservative ideologues such as Irving Kristol recognized the need for a public philosophy/theology to fill in the vacuum created by the supersession of the liberal state over classical republican ideals, the immanentist implications of fundamentalist Christianity would seem to have been an unwelcome development for some—an unintended consequences of sorts. Kevin Phillips, for instance, an architect in the construction of the Republican Party's coalition in the South, laments the current direction of GOP, particularly as embodied by George W. Bush's administration.[16] "The old mainline churches," Philips writes, "have been culturally and institutionally displaced

---

[15] Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*, 215.

[16] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil and Borrowed Money*, (New York: Viking, 2006).

by a new plurality; yesteryear's supposed fringes are taking over American Protestantism's main square."[17] Added to the displacement of the "old mainline churches," is the notion of the displacement of a relative separation of religion and politics; that is to say, hitherto, no overt religious sects sought to capture and manipulate the levers of American government and wield it to its own advantage. As Philips adds, however, this is all changing with the rise of what he refers to as "radicalized religion":

> Few questions will be more important to the twenty-first century United States than whether *renascent religion* [emphasis mine] and its accompanying political hubris will be carried on the nation's books as an asset or a liability. While sermons and rhetoric propounding American exceptionalism proclaim religiosity as an asset, a somber array of historical precedents—the pitfalls of imperial Christian overreach from Rome to Britain—tip the scales toward liability.[18]

The implications of this change on the American political scene are profound and far-reaching.

Religion in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century America was typified by the Protestant theological phenomenon known as the Social Gospel movement, a movement in parallel with, if not an essential part of, the Progressive Era. The movement in itself, while focusing on the notion of a Christian commonwealth—that is, a social environment characterized by the implementation of certain precepts delineated in the Sermon on the Mount—did not constitute an overt immanentist movement in the sense described above (though as we will see, it did add leverage in tipping the scales toward immanentism). Rather, its attention was on ameliorating the dismal conditions brought about by capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization. John Marshall Barker, for instance, describes the temper of the movement of the time:

---

[17] Ibid., 101.

[18] Ibid., 99.

> The Christian Church [has become] the bearer of a vital and definite social message of world-wide significance. It is nothing less than a new social order in which God is consciously present in the common life of men as a ruling and inspiring power. The social ideal is that of a commonwealth of God. It presents the social vision of a new heaven and a new earth wherein justice, brotherhood, and coöperative service among men become the ruling principle of action. It implies the progressive social incarnation of God in the realm of goodwill and mutual service.[19]

Hence, the Social Gospel movement can be understood very much as a reaction to Hobbes's stern conception of human worth in strictly market terms[20]—an understanding of human worth that gained greater saliency as capitalism grew in significance.

Accordingly, the Social Gospel placed emphasis on the value and worth of each individual in terms of a membership in a greater brotherhood within God's creation. The movement was, in part, a calculated rebuke to the radical individualism posited by the Social Darwinists and advocates of radical *laissez faire* of the period. As Stanley Hauerwas explains:

> In spite of their tremendous criticism of American capitalism, the social gospelers were committed to progressivist ideology and policies. They never doubted the uniqueness of the American experience or entertained any critical doubt about the achievement of the American ideal, which they saw as nothing less than the realization of the Kingdom of God.[21]

The problem was not so much the American ideal but how to achieve it. The Social Gospel's vision was an idealistic vision, albeit one of limited human agency. Their vision required the transformation of society's institutions into institutions that reflected the truth of the Gospel's "Sermon on the Mount," and it was in this requirement that the

---

[19] John Marshal Barker, *The Social Gospel and the New Era*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), 1ff.; see also Josiah Strong, *The New Era: Or, The Coming Kingdom*, (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1893) for a practitioner's understanding of the movement.

[20] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 151-152.

[21] Stanley M. Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds., (Duram: Duke University Press, 2001), 56.

movement never gained significant traction. In the era in which the "business of America was business," such claims for social change and melioration were lost in the clamor and discord of the machinery of capitalism. At best, perhaps democracy, in its glorified form, could mollify the excesses of the market. Or perhaps a renewed discourse on Christian ethics could take the movement to the next level of social change. As Hauerwas adds:

> The only question was how to bring the economic institutions of American life under the same spirit of cooperation that American political institutions had already achieved. … It was clear that the movement started by the social gospel movement required not only a new social strategy, but also a new theological rationale. Christian ethics became the discipline pledged to find just that. The great figure representing this project was Reinhold Niebuhr, who began his career as a social gospel advocate, became its most powerful critic, and quite possibly the last publicly accessible and influential theologian in America.[22]

Christian ethics in the vein of Niebuhr stood as a logical alternative for theologians and Progressive social critics of the time. But for the masses of American society such theological speculation stood outside of everyday experiences. Thus, while the Social Gospel movement ran strong in the "old mainline" Protestant churches and in intellectual-theological circles of prestigious seminaries, particularly in the urbanized, better educated, and wealthier North, in the poor, rural South, Protestant fundamentalism gained adherents.[23] It was in the South that a more conservative, populist theology, that is, the "renascent religion" and its radical manifestations of which Phillips writes, received new life. As opposed to the Social Gospel's progressive orientation, this conservative Protestant religious experience hearkened back to the primacy and infallibility of the authors of the Old Testament and the New Testament's Gospels and Epistles, particularly the Pentecost experience.

---

[22] Ibid., 58.

[23] Cf., Barker, *The Social Gospel and the New Era*, 163ff and 177ff.

Despite such distinctions, however, within both theological streams, that is the Social Gospel and the more conservative Protestantism, the nascent seeds of radicalism can be discerned. To a certain extent, such radicalism can be understood emanating from a return to so-called Christian "fundamentals." A significant aspect of America's resurgent radical religiosity is primarily due to a "Fundamentalist" theology, a somewhat complicated classification that has been used to describe several often-disparate manifestations of American Protestant Christianity. For instance, religious scholar R. Lawrence Moore writes:

> Unhappily, the familiarity of the term [fundamentalism] has not clarified what phenomena are properly and fairly encompassed by the label. … No matter how one defines Fundamentalism, one risks joining together in Christian fellowship a lot of people who would prefer to remain apart. … Many theologically conservative Christians who accept the label 'evangelical' resist the association with Fundamentalism because they associate that word with aggressive and judgmental separatism.[24]

Generally speaking, however, Christian fundamentalism in the United States can be understood as those theological doctrines in which attention is given to the claim of the inerrancy of the Bible, the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, and in particular, the eschatological fulfillment of the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation.

Christian fundamentalism in the United States, oddly enough, did not begin as a strictly Southern phenomenon, but rather, can be traced to Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) and the influence of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago Illinois. Moody's work centered on evangelizing to the world; that is, bringing the Gospel to more and more people to whom its truth had hitherto been unknown. Moody's theological heirs, in the spirit of

---

[24] R. Lawrence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 150-151.

reform, sought to bring Christianity to what they perceived as its theological roots. As Kevin Phillips explains:

> Between 1910 and 1915 Moody's conservative successors, alarmed at the liberal theology and secular spirit, published a series of booklets called "The Fundamentals." These most basic of the basics, beyond all compromise, included an intense focus on evangelicalism; the need for an infilling of the Holy Spirit after conversion; belief in the imminent second coming of Christ; and the absolute inerrant authority of the Bible.[25]

This spirit ran particularly strong in the American South. The South, with the Civil War experience ever in the minds of succeeding generations, proved a fertile ground for a populist religion that romanticized and amplified the notion of a faithful yet subjugated people similar to the experience of ancient Israel. "Southerners," argues Phillips, "identified with Israel because of their self-image as a more prayerful people than northerners—and because they shared Israelites' belief of being the people of a beleaguered small nation surrounded by enemies."[26] For the less educated rural residents of the South, the highly personal experiences offered by Southern denominations, such as the infilling or indwelling of the Spirit and other charismatic outbursts, appealed to those needing more fundamental, direct interactions with the divine.

American Protestantism's Millennialists Tendencies

Evangelicalism and fundamentalism are significant aspects of the radical Protestantism that emerged in the United States in the twentieth century. But perhaps an even more important factor is the radicalism that springs from certain expectations involving Christian eschatology—namely, from differing and competing conceptions of

[25] Phillips, *American Theocracy*, 116.

[26] Ibid., 143-144.

the role of the "faithful" in end-time events understood as pre- and post-millennialism. This theological discord concerning God's plan of redemption, along with disputes over the course of eschatological events—including the role of the faithful in such plans and events—informs a significant aspect of American Protestantism. In an important work on this subject, *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (1997), Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer illustrate the intensity of the debate over millennial expectations:

> In the last few centuries two Christian millennialist orientations have competed in the United States: *postmillennialism*, which envisions the return of Christ transpiring after the millennial kingdom has been ushered in largely by human agency in terms of the gradual Christianization of culture; and *premillennialism,* which sees humanity as incapable of creating the kingdom or even blocking the coming reign of the Antichrist (or Great Tribulation), such that Christ must return with a heavenly host and vanquish Antichrist at Armageddon before the millennium can unfold.[27]

Pre-millennialism informs much of American Protestantism and is the belief that Christ will return—imminently—to "rapture" his faithful flock from a world doomed to be ravaged by tribulations. The rapture doctrine, in itself, is a rather dubious theological dogma of recent origin and is best associated with nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish evangelical Thomas Nelson Darby (1800-1882). As a contemporary religious doctrine, the rapture has become highly popularized and made mainstream by the growth of Christian television networks, popular books fictionalizing end-times events, and the confluence of events in the Middle East seen as harbingers of the Second Coming of Christ. Closely wedded to the doctrine of the rapture is the doctrine of "dispensationalism," or the notion that each age of humanity is characterized by a

---

[27] Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer, *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9.

particular form of God's dispensation—or stewardships—bestowed by God upon his "anointed" human agents—a philosophy of history culminating in kingdom of the "elect."[28] As Chip Berlet explains:

> For many decades the primary form of Christian eschatology has been a form of pre-millennialism called Dispensationalism (an interpretation developed in the nineteenth century by English theologian Thomas Nelson Darby), which outlined specific epochs of history or "dispensations pre-ordained by God. Based on this timeline, at a specific point early in the End Times, Christians will be swept up safely away from the Earth in a process called the "rapture." In this way, devout Christians are protected from some or all of the Tribulations. After the sinful are punished and purged, Christ returns for a millennium of rule over his loyal flock, which has been restored to an earthly paradise.[29]

Darby and his successors crafted their "pre-tribulation" rapture doctrine over the course of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1957, the rapture doctrine entered common theological discourse with the publication of the *Rapture Question* by theologian, minister, and president of the Dallas Theological Seminary, John Walvoord.[30] Walvoord established himself as a prolific writer on the subject of the rapture and, along with colleagues and graduates from the Dallas Theological Seminary, did much to advance the doctrine. Hal Lindsey, for instance, a graduate of the seminary, popularized rapture themes in his national best seller, T*he Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970)—later

---

[28] Dispensationalism is defined as a "theological movement within Evangelicalism stressing an apocalyptic understanding of history. Its peculiarities arise from an interpretation of the history of redemption which sees the Old and New Testaments united eschatologically in a way that is consistent with historical-grammatical (sometimes referred to as 'literal') interpretations of Old and New Testaments, and consistent with the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to national Israel of an earthly kingdom ruled personally by the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is a philosophy of history, adherence to which encompasses diverse theologies in the evangelical tradition," (*Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Alister E McGrath ed., s.v. "Dispensationalism"); see also Schlesinger, *Cycles of American History*, 13.

[29] Berlet, "Christian Identity: The Apocalyptic Style, Political Religion, Palingenesis, and Neo-Fascism," in *Fascism, Totalitarianism, and Political Religion,* ed. Roger Griffen, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 186.

[30] John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question,* 2nd edition, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

made into a major motion picture and narrated by Orson Welles.[31] More recently, these themes have been made mainstream and highly popularized (if not sensationalized) with the publication of the *Left Behind* book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins—a series which was made into a series of motion pictures and even a computer game.

Rapture theology did not always form such a profound influence on American Protestantism. As Gary Dorrien explains in *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (1998): "Most of the Puritans who settled New England were premillennialist, but they were, for the most part, not especially doctrinaire about the about the details of millennial prophesy."[32] By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, this view would change significantly as evangelical preachers began to press the notion that the present age and all its afflictions, and even history itself, was doomed to destruction. "This sense of futility and darkness of the world," Dorrien adds, "fueled an explosion of apocalyptic millennialist movements."[33] These movements met with considerable success in terms of attracting adherents, especially those seeking escape from what they viewed as a sin-sick world. As such, pre-millennialism engendered both a withdrawal from worldly-affairs, as well as a degree of interventionism on the part of the faithful—albeit an intervention that differed qualitatively than that of the Social Gospel movement. "Premillennialist eschatology," argues Dorrien:

> negated…the Christian mission to reform social conditions. Armed with Darby's apocalyptic reading of scripture, premillennialist preachers insisted that the

[31] Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

[32] Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Publications, 1998), 28.

[33] Ibid.

> church had no social role to promote social justice. Their preaching redirected American evangelicalism away from earlier social commitments.[34]

For pre-millennialists, the great task remaining before the faithful in an increasingly depraved and doomed world concerned the spreading of the Word, the gathering of the elect (i.e., the "saved"), and the waiting for the inevitable *rapture*—hence the emphasis on Scripture's lament that many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 24:14). For the elect, the saving of souls becomes a primary preoccupation, with harvest and pastoral metaphors best describing the earthly mission of the Church.

Post-millennialism, on the other hand, involves a highly interventionist agenda, one that attempts to impose, in no uncertain terms, a Christian political superstructure on top of the existing institutions of American political society. This intervention is necessary in order to facilitate the return of Christ and the initiation of one thousand years of his realm of peace and prosperity. And whereas pre-millennialist share the view that the Second Coming of Christ is impending, postmillennialist tend to take a longer view of the matter, hence a greater strategy in worldly-affairs as opposed to a semi-passive waiting for the end of it all. As Chip Berlet observes:

> Those who believe Jesus Christ returns at the end of a thousand years of Christian rule are called post-millennialists because they believe they have to intervene in earthly affairs and seize society and hold it for one thousand years—a millennium—before Christ returns. Post-millenniums is therefore an inherently interventionist theology.[35]

These post-millennial tendencies arose in large part due to the perceived short-comings of a well-intentioned but somewhat myopic segment of God's elect in the United States,

---

[34] Ibid., 156.

[35] Chip Berlet, "Christian Identity: The Apocalyptic Style, Political Religion, Palingenesis, and Neo-Fascism," 185.

whose focus was on altruistic measures such as eliminating abortion and pornography, but who failed to take into full account to true threat to God's elect, the impending reign of the Antichrist. This looming threat required the full political mobilization of faithful Christians in the United States. As Robbins and Palmer explain:

> Premillennialist fundamentalism arose almost a century ago as evangelical protestants confronted what they saw as an increasingly degraded modernist culture. The contemporary impetus for neo-postmillennialism has come from a reaction to the *fatalism* with premillennialism that is arguably out of sync with growing voluntaristic political activism among conservative evangelicals.[36]

This radical tendency of post-millennialists is thus wedded to a long-term social agenda. On certain accounts, this agenda may be rather benign. For instance, in keeping with the Gospel's charge to help the poor, the destitute, the infirmed and so forth, post-millennialism sees the need to implement Christ's commands in order to bring about the millennial reign of peace and a universal brotherhood of man. Post-millennialist theology, however, has also taken on the air of a righteous crusade, going beyond the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, to that of capturing key political institutions in order to thwart what is seen as greater demonic machinations: whereas the United States represents an elect nation, carefully prepared by God for a special place in history, America's political institutions had to seized and held by a vanguard of the faithful in order to fulfill God's divine plans for humanity. As Sara Diamond explains in *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (1989):

> Whereas many "pre-millennialist" believe their priority must be to convert and save as many individuals as possible before the "rapture," postmillennialist tend to be less frantic. But their theology is actually more radical … Postmillennialist seek to evangelize entire institutions.[37]

---

[36] Robbins and Palmer, *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, 10.

[37] Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1989), 137.

Postmillennialists tend to bide their time, recognizing the greater plan being played out in God's order of being.

Further added to this radical Protestant mix are the convoluted theologies defined as Dominionism and Christian Reconstructionism, each distinguished from mainstream Evangelical Christianity's emphasis on pre-millennialism and rather, in the post-millennial vein, stressing the need for Christian interventionism. In her 1995 book *Roads to Dominion*, Diamond describes Dominion Theology and its more refined and "intellectually grounded"—though esoteric—Christian Reconstructionist movement, as putting an assertive edge on America's renascent religious experience.[38] As Diamond explains, Dominionism involves a worldview rather than a set of tenets and tends to revolve around the idea "that Christians, and Christians alone, are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns."[39] Much of this theology involves preparing the way for the Kingdom of God on earth; in other words, the passing of the Old Testament mandate of ancient Israel to a new elect (i.e., the United States), and hence, gaining control of America's political institutions—national and sub-national—in order to facilitate the conditions for Christ's return. Genesis 1:28, and its directive for Adam and Eve to have dominion over all the earth, stands as a key passage of Scripture, and the Old Testament's codified law stand as the basis of socio-political order. As Amitai Etzioni explains:

> Dominion theologians interpret this passage to mean that *believers* [emphasis mine] are entitled to control all the world's major institutions. Such control may

---

[38] Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-wing Movements and Political Power in the United States*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 247.

[39] Ibid., 246.

> entail enforcing Mosaic Law instead of a legislature's, churches and families taking over education and welfare completely, or even using stoning as punishment. At the extreme, other religions become heresy, and heresy becomes treason.[40]

While such endeavors may appear extreme, there does appear to be much dispute and contention between popular advocates as to the precise prescriptions for the preparation by the elect. Dominion theologians often launched harsh criticisms toward those who did not uphold, in their view, the true dispensation, even those whose orientations were not very far removed from their own. However, as Diamond adds, "What was important about Reconstructionism and other expressions of dominion theology [is] not so much the eccentricities of its key advocates but rather the diffuse influence of the ideas that America was ordained as a Christian nation, and that Christians, exclusively, were to rule and reign."[41] Hence, a post-Millennial theology has come to inform the greater Evangelical movement through the diffusion and intermingling of the various strands of radicalized Protestant theologies, in part, by the popularization of many of these themes in mainstream Christian media. As Diamond concludes, "Dominionist thinking revealed how far evangelicalism had come in the twentieth century …many evangelicals were no longer content to secure their right to preach a gospel message. They sought to save not just lost souls, but the engines of society itself."[42] And for a nation in an epic struggle against the "evil empire" that was the Soviet Union, or more recently, the struggle against the "axis of evil" and the purveyors of terrorism, only a truly Christian nation, living

---

[40] Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 17.

[41] Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, .248.

[42] Ibid., 248-249.

within the precepts mandated by God, were fully equipped to end evil for all time on the face of the earth and to initiate an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity.

It is important to keep in mind that post-millennialism informed both the Social Gospel movement and the radical Dominion theologies. The Social Gospel movement, however, sought to temper the excesses of modernity, particularly capitalism and its tendency toward disparities in wealth and inequality, along with the resulting social malaise (alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, dismal conditions in America's cities, and so forth), and the various levels of conflict associated with these disparities. Such tempering was in line with Gospels' call for unconditional love and to "do unto others…" (Matthew 7: 12). For the adherents of the Social Gospel, Christians could, and perhaps more importantly, should, build a better society in preparation for the coming millennial reign of Christ. Dominionism, on the other hand, has a much more radical agenda, namely in its goals of seizing the levers of powers of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

The Theology of Social Transformation and Human Perfection

There can be little doubt that the Social Gospel's postmillennialist tendencies came to inform greater theological discourse in the United States, and in particular the notion that society and even the individual could be transformed and ultimately perfected. By mere ideational diffusion, this discourse influenced even the more conventional understandings of Scripture, lending to the more radical elements of American Protestantism. Dominion theologies, for instance, have the radical agenda of seizing key positions of power in order to propagate a singular vision of Christian end-time events.

These radical understandings of human capabilities clearly opens the door to immanentism and movements that seek to transform both society and individuals in terms of the contents of specific theological dogma. These doctrines too have been influential in terms of theological discourse. And with events in the Middle East playing out in what may believe portend the fulfilling of Scriptural end-time warnings, and with the United States facing decline in both its economic and international standing, Dominion theologies are gaining adherents who seek not only to arrest American decline, but fulfill God's plan for the American people.

One additional outcome concerning the radicalization of American Protestantism is of note. The resurgent religious radicalism has also brought with it a rise of a highly materialistic theology, one in which God's blessings are manifest in very real material terms and material wealth is taken to be an outward sign of God's blessing. This stream of Protestant thought, or what is referred to as the "prosperity gospel" or "prosperity theology," is an old take on Calvinism's notion of predestination and form an essential aspect of the American character. Radical *laisse-faire* economic theory, so much a target of the Social Gospel movement, thus emerges with a religious sanction under the radical sectarianism developing in the United States, with stewardship taking on an air of license. As Charles Kimbal observes:

> Many television ministries in the United States take a decidedly different approach to stewardship. They advocate a so-called prosperity gospel. In brief, this approach teaches that God wants to bless God's people with material goods. In order to tap into the bountiful storehouse, faithful believers must plant a "seed," that is, contribute a designated amount of money to the particular ministry in question. This approach appeals to both the fear that one will "miss out on the

> blessing God has in store" for him or her and to base human desire on material wealth [43]

Moreover, capitalism fits in well with the rise of the Religious Right in the United States and the growing popularity of the prosperity gospel. The Biblical tradition places considerable emphasis on humanity's role as the stewards over God's creation. Being created in God's image and given the command "to be fruitful and multiply," humanity is endowed by their creator with a creative capacity—not unlike capitalism's supposed "creative destruction"—and a role to play in God's creation. Capitalism places considerable emphasis on personal responsibility, a work ethic that rewards productive labor and due diligence on the part of the individual in the management of resources, and can seen as being a creative force in society by way of economic growth, higher standards of living, new technology, and so forth. In turn, the market can be corrective, if not downright punishing, for those slothful individuals and those poor in managing their resources. In this sense, it is easy to understand how American exceptionalism could evolve from a radical religious orientation into a pragmatic doctrine for many Americans—prosperity seemed to be a sign of God's blessing to a faithful individual, and a promise held out to a faithful nation. America, subsequently, could easily be construed to embody both the stewardship of God, as well as the material blessing of God's anointed nation with a preeminent role in history.

---

[43] Charles Kimbal, *When Religion Becomes Dangerous: Five Warning Signs*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 223; cf., Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 102ff, and Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 55ff.

The Drift into Immanentism

The rise of fundamentalism and the millennial tendencies in American Protestantism eventually served to undermine the tempering qualities of Christianity and its fundamental position in the traditional American civil religion. Without these tempering qualities some of the more radical elements of fundamentalism and millennialism eventually slipped into greater social discourse. One can even argue that the Social Gospel's emphasis of social transformation—in conjunction with its own postmillennialist tendencies—came to inform such discourse by its more benign suggestion of society's eventual transformation and perfection. And with such theological constructs as the rapture and prosperity theology, populist demands, ever increasing in wake of the impact of modernity, came to be easily sated with promises of being swept off the earth with Christ before the period of unimaginable tribulation—along with the notion of living life to its fullest in materialistic terms prior to the fact. The drift into immanentism, then, can be understood in terms of the breakdown of the older civil religion along with the diminishing importance of its accompanying "old mainline churches" and their more conventional theological positions. With the recognition of this breakdown of both the old church structure and traditional civil religion, what clearly ensued was the scramble to establish a new civil theology for the masses of the American people by way of a charismatic, yet once marginal Protestant sectarianism—a sectarianism with definitive ideological tendencies. Conservative thinkers, particularly the neoconservatives indoctrinated in Straussian political theory, recognized the advantage to be gained by an energized evangelical and fundamentalist Christian voting bloc. Great effort was expended to mobilize this voting bloc and

alliances were formed between conservative elites and populist Christian leaders to propagate what amounted to a Hobbesian type of civil theology for American political society. The knowledge of this construction of a civil theology as a civil theology may or may not have escaped them. Evidence of this has not surfaced. Nevertheless, full consideration was clearly not given to the potential consequences of a politically empowered faction of the American people, the attention of which was focused on the imminent fulfillment of biblical prophecy and America's exceptional role in God's divine plan for mankind—a somewhat tortuous mixture of pre- and postmillennialist tendencies.

The impact of modernity opened the door to the degeneration of the older American civil religion, which in turn opened up the messianic tendencies that had been constrained by the civil religion's organic quality. Modernity demanded a new standard, that is, a human standard. While secularization steadily eroded faith in a transcendent measure, science propped up the new standard: faith in human creative capacities. In Voegelinian terms this can be translated into gnosticism. Christianity placed emphasis on humanity's propensity to sin, ameliorated by faith in the grace of God and atonement by way of the sacrifice of his Son, the "Lamb of God." Gnosticism, on the other hand, placed emphasis on human ignorance, ameliorated by human knowledge alone. Hence, ideologies filled the void of secularized societies on the European continent—with the great conflicts of the twentieth century a testament to the limits of human knowledge and industry (i.e., contrivance). In the United States, on the other hand, religion played a central role in society, with "Great Awakenings" and religious "revivals" harbingers of things to come.

Religious liberty, in its own way, provided the conditions for the radicalization of American Protestantism. "With the choice of worship permitted," Kevin Phillips argues, "late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American Protestants, among the worlds most bible reading, flocked to the sort of individualist and antihierarchical faith that emphasized a personal relationship with God."[44] But this was not all. The "sect-driven dynamic," as Philips describes it, fueled a separation of the elect from the machinations of the world. "Periodic revivalism,' Philips adds, "fed a still-resonate exodus of Americans from established churches that had given up emotion for respectability, turning instead to movements or sects that emphasized salvation, spirituality, physical displays, founders' claims to special revelation, faith healing, and 'holiness upon the land.'"[45] In short, the various Protestant sects in the United States engendered a feeling within the individual of being special in the eyes of the Lord, particularly in a world gone especially cold and impersonal and with the individual adrift in a sea of alienation. By the end of the twentieth century, modernity, in the guise of communism, socialism, and secular humanism, further challenged the psyche of the American "heartland." Charismatic religious experience, along with the notion of being "born again" into a spiritual community of saints, largely filled the vacuum for many of these Americans, with such slogans as "better dead than red" resonating among the devout. The events of September 11, 2001 have only exacerbated these tensions. As Philips explains it: "In its recent practice, the radical side of U.S. religion has embraced cultural antimodernism, war hawkishness, Armageddon prophecy, and in the case of conservative fundamentalist,

[44] Philips, *American Theocracy*, 104.

[45] Ibid.

a demand for government by literal biblical interpretation."[46] Hence, American exceptionalism is seen in both American Protestantism's claim to a unique relationship with God and the need to perfect human society in order to fulfill God's plan for humanity—even if such perfection is, in the end, ultimately transient.

Political opportunism and a lack of historical consciousness have played a significant part in the project to fill in the vacuum of the older civil religion; a civil religion plunged, as it were, into experiential atrophy or opaqueness by the impact of modernity and the need for efficacious policy to address the needs of a modernized society. Whereas the liberal state effectively imparted a highly secular influence on the public sphere, significantly impacting the old civil religion by emptying the public sphere of transcendent meaning—as seen, for example, in court cases to remove "one nation under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance—the effort to fill the vacuum often took on heightened intensity, stemming, it would seem, from the interests of America's heartland. All the same, this effort was no mere populist reaction, though the masses are indeed the intended audience. In the effort to secure the White House in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections and to garner a "permanent Republican majority" (or as Hugh Hewitt writes, "painting the map red") in subsequent elections, the Evangelical Christian voting bloc proved essential as the base for George W. Bush's political campaign and for that of the Republican Party.[47] Indeed, one message that the Republican Party is urged to

---

[46] Ibid., 100.

[47] Hugh Hewitt, *Painting the Map Red: The Fight to Create a Permanent Republican Majority*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2006). See also, Governor George W Bush, Proclamation, "Jesus Day." Texas State Archives, Official Memorandum, State of Texas, Office of the Governor. The proclamation of Governor George W. Bush, that 10 June 2000 was 'Jesus Day' in Texas.

put out, and one that is essential to Republican electoral success, is the message that "The Democratic Left has declared war on religion."[48] As Hewitt argues,

> Americans believe in God and think their leaders ought to as well. The vast majority of Americans are Christians and they are incredibly protective of the right of free exercise enshrined in the First Amendment … In recent decades, though, the left has set out to de-legitimize a large slice of religious belief in the United States. [49]

Recognition of a "war" on religion is critical to the GOP's political platform, as Hewitt adds, in that "ordinary Americans of ordinary religious belief are likely to put up with. In fact, the massive shift toward W [i.e., George W Bush] in November 2004 was just the beginning."[50] But even prior to the 2004 Presidential elections, Governor George W. Bush presented a Christian message and a "Charge to Keep" in a memo to the staff of the governors office based on the Christian hymn by Charles Wesley of the same name which Bush quotes: "To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; O may it all my powers engage to do my Master's will."[51] Governor Bush, evidently, also made it clear that his charge was not simply to the state of Texas. As Howard Fineman reports:

> As he prepared to run, in 1999, Bush assembled leading pastors at the governor's mansion for a "laying-on of hands," and told them he'd been "called" to seek higher office. In the GOP primaries, he outmaneuvered the field by practicing what one rival, Gary Bauer, called "identity politics." Others tried to woo evangelicals by pledging strict allegiance on issues such as abortion and gay rights. "Bush talked about his faith," said Bauer, "and people just believed him—and believed in him." There was genius in this.[52]

---

[48] 83ff.

[49] Ibid., 83-84.

[50] Ibid., 103.

[51] Governor George W Bush, Memorandum, "A Charge to Keep I Have." Texas State Archives, Official Memorandum, State of Texas, Office of the Governor

[52] Howard Fineman, "Bush and God," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003.

Reports also indicate that Bush saw the calling in terms of foreign policy, the war against Islamic terrorists, and the military action against Saddam Hussein, "Operation Iraqi Freedom." As Fineman adds: "At Opryland in Nashville—the old 'Buckle of the Bible Belt'—Bush told religious broadcasters that 'the terrorists hate the fact that ... we can worship Almighty God the way we see fit,' and that the United States was called to bring God's gift of liberty to "every human being in the world."[53]

Attention to Bush's alleged comments that God had "called" him to be President of the United States, to invade Iraq, and so forth, aside, there are clues to the shift in the American experience that fit in with Bellah's analysis. Recall that Bellah's analysis indicates that broad and general Judeo-Christian themes pervade America's public documents, ceremonies, beliefs, and rituals. While Bush's 2001 Inaugural Address kept to the precedent of a general and inclusive notion of the divine—including the first reference to the mosque—Franklin Graham's invocation and Kirbyjon Caldwell's benediction contain controversial direct references to Jesus Christ in Bush's public inaugural ceremony.[54] Graham for instance, prays: "May this be the beginning of a new dawn for America as we humble ourselves before you and acknowledge you alone as our Lord, our Savior and our Redeemer." Familiar is the claim to a new beginning for America, and, one might infer, the providential quality of the United States. Graham concludes by stating, "We pray this in the name of the Father, and the son, the Lord Jesus

---

[53] Ibid.

[54] See Bill Broadway, "God's Pace on the Dais: Use of 'Jesus' in Inaugural Prayers Breeds Some Worry," *Washington Post*, January 27, 2001, page B9.

Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."[55] Caldwell, a Houston Methodist pastor, adds a degree of both inclusive and exclusiveness: "And lastly Lord we thank you for favor. We thank you for your divine favor. … And of course, Lord, let your divine favor be upon President George W. Bush and Laura Welch Bush and their family. We declare that no weapon formed against them shall prosper. … We respectfully submit this humble prayer that's above all other names, Jesus the Christ. *Let all who agree say 'amen'*" (emphasis mine).[56] Whatever may be the degree of agreement, the intention is clear: to tilt America's spiritual affinity in favor of sectarian Protestant Christianity, or that of America's supposed spiritual roots.

The United States, likewise, is displaying a similar trend that occurred in continental experience (and contrary to Huntington's hopeful analysis), that while initiated by American elites, the contemporary American experience indicates the construction of a civil theology appealing to the more populist sections of American political society and embodying a sectarian ideology of sorts. Recall that Voegelin identifies one method to cope with the lack of a civil theology for the Western states as the attempts by sectarian communities to "impose by force their immanentist beliefs on a society as a state cult."[57] As with past immanentist movements, the American trend also contains notions of immanent eschatological fulfillment, or the movement toward the end of history. Moreover, this trend seems to embody the imposition of truth, or what has been described as the "imperial representation of truth." Recall that the political and

---

[55] Franklin Graham, "Invocation" delivered at President George W. Bush Inaugural Service, January 21, 2001, in Washington, D.C.

[56] Kirbyjon Caldwell "Benediction," delivered at President George W. Bush Inaugural Service, January 21, 2001, in Washington, D.C.

[57] Voegelin, "Industrial Society in Search of Reason," 36.

legal constructions resulting from imperial truth include: the notion that the political society in question is in harmony with the truth of history; that the aim of the political society is to establish and secure the realm of freedom and peace on the earth—in the here and now; that the opponents of society run counter to the truth of history and will ultimately be defeated in the end; that no opponent can "legitimately" be at war with such a society, but rather, must be "representative of untruth in history, or, in contemporary language, an aggressor;" and finally, "the victims are not conquered, but liberated from their oppressors, and therewith from the untruth of their existence."[58] Phillips's "radical side of U.S. religion," then, is indicative of a general trend toward heightened religious experience coupled with an outright political agenda—and sympathetic governing institutions, in the Congress, the Executive, the Judiciary, and even the bureaucracy, to put this agenda into action.

Thus, in addition to an educated sub-division of Americans without a normative grounding (the New Class of the neoconservatives), there exists a populist sub-division caught up in highly passionate pseudo-Gospel of Christianity—with the added blessing of divinely provisioned material wealth or the "prosperity gospel." In combination with the popularity of the best-selling *Left Behind* book series, Generation Joshua, the import of James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" ministry, the Christian Research Council, Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and Paul Crouch's Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN), the resurgence of "rapture" theology (or pre-millennial dispensationalism), but also Christian re-constructionists[59] (or post-millennialist

---

[58] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 135.

[59] That is, "true" Christians must prepare the way for the Second Coming and to claim the land for Jesus Christ—a dominion of Christianity, not just in the United States, but across the globe; see also

Christians labeled the "American Taliban"), and so forth, Schlesinger's notion of "America as destiny" garners renewed significance as American exceptionalism can be understood in radically spiritual terms—i.e., as the nation founded by God's elect and the nation empowered to do God's bidding on earth.

While this new jingoistic prosperity theology holds out the promise of a better world yet to come, in the meantime, social indicators of another kind actually reveal noteworthy reverses in American society. Inequality in the United States, for instance, has increased significantly. The United States Census Bureau reveals increasing inequality in the United States over the last thirty years, with the top fifth of American households having $14.30 of income for every $1.00 as the bottom fifth by 2002.[60] This is a significant shift from 1976, when the top fifth had $9.84 for every $1.00 of the bottom fifth. Recent Republican tax cuts may have increased this inequality further. In addition, executive pay in the United States has seen an extraordinary rise in relation to the pay of the average American worker. Robert Reich, for instance, reports that in 1960, the average CEO's take-home pay was about forty times of that of the average American worker's.[61] By 1988, Reich reports the difference as high as ninety-three times. Recent reports put the average CEO's compensation as high as four hundred times that of the average worker. Many reasons are given for the rise in inequality: from a tax system favoring the wealthy, to single-mother households, to the wage gap, in which, as Reich explains, "the hourly earnings of American non-supervisory workers within American

---

Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), for more on Christian re-constructionism.

[60] See United States Census Bureau, *Income in the United States: 2002*, (September 2003), 25.

[61] Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 204-205.

owned-corporations, adjusted for inflation, were lower than in any year since 1965."[62] The growth in inequality runs counter to the old conservative acceptance of relative equality as opposed to extreme inequality—that is, the assumption that there will always be differences in ability, effort, and so forth, but for a stable society a modicum of material equality was necessary. More recently, changes in the tax structure, such as the elimination of the estate tax (now euphemistically labeled the "death tax"), along with new tax cuts benefiting the very wealthy (also euphemistically relabeled as "tax relief") signal the concentration of wealth into the hands of an ever-smaller group of Americans. Meanwhile, working Americans are relying ever more on the "financial services" industry, or what Kevin Phillip's refers to as the "debt-industrial complex," to finance their day-to-day living expenses.[63] The prosperity that America achieved in the post-World War II, Keynesian era, while accompanied by relative inequality and existing poverty, did see America's distribution of wealth firmly increase within the American middle-class. The "financialization" of America's economy, that is, the shift away from manufacturing to a service-based economy, on the other hand, has been accompanied by economic dislocations, as high paying manufacturing job in the United States are being outsourced to regions with lower overall wages, longer working hours, dismal working conditions, lax environmental laws, and so forth. American's themselves are faced with lower wages, families characterized by two "breadwinners," longer work weeks, diminished vacation time, and increasing levels of consumer debt. Even "born again" Christians are falling into this pattern of excessive consumer debt. Indeed, anecdotal

[62] Ibid., 1999-205.

[63] Phillips, *American Theocracy*, 265ff and 283ff.

evidence reveals that some evangelical Protestants, expecting that the end of the world and the rapture are imminent, are deliberating running up large amounts of debt on the assumption that they will not be around to have to pay it back.

All this reveals that far from reviving the old notion of the American republic, what has actually evolved from this alliance is something that runs quite counter to it. By this assessment, the alliance that neoconservatives entered into with the Christian Right has actually accelerated the process that both of these groups initially reacted to, namely, the weakening of the American social fabric. That far from strengthening the social fabric, or even reversing the radicalism they saw arising from the political Left, the alliance actually aggravated the situation by creating a radicalism emerging from the Right. But the radicalism that emerged from the Right was no mere corruption of "traditional" American mores and folkways; this radicalism stood to open the door to the kind of immanentism seen in other ideological movements.

The old civil religion had functioned to restrain America's immanentist tendencies. Whether the vestiges of the older civil religion can still perform this function remains to be seen.

AMERICAN GLOBAL HEGEMONY UNDER CHALLENGE

Added to these domestic factors in the United States are the increasingly unstable geopolitical conditions of recent years and the impact these events have had on the American public psychology. Americans are increasingly experiencing multifaceted threats to their security, economic prosperity, and well being, and a significant decline in America's overall leadership position in the world. Confounding this situation is the

historical memory of Americans: its humble Puritanical origins, its "founding" period, the struggle of the Civil War and the industrialization following Reconstruction, its noble undertaking in World War I and Wilson's mission of "internationalism," the mobilization of American society to fight World War II and the ideological struggle of the Cold War, and finally the construction of a liberal postwar institutional system built on political, economic, and security interdependence and integration. From these experiences, America has come to interpret itself in a very unique way, and in turn, develop a unique set of values. The values espoused in America's struggles (understood in certain theological circles as a process of purification), and the institutions built on these values, took on the air of permanency regarding the future of human social organization. The truth of American society was thus accepted as a universal truth and formed the basis of American foreign policy. The American case, therefore, can be interpreted as one in which the meaning of its social order has been confused or misinterpreted as a fact of existence itself. The United States is, in effect, caught in a tension of its very success. On the one hand, there is a proclivity on the part of American society to enjoy the fruits of past's labors, to rest on its laurels, so to speak, and to enjoy the accumulated material blessings of the wealth of the nation. (And what more can be a testament to the truth American society embodies than its very materialistic success?) With this success, however, comes a set of consequences. As Voegelin explains, "one can speak of an inclination to disregard the structure of reality, of relaxing into the sweetness of existence, of a decline of civic morality, of a blindness to obvious dangers, and a reluctance to meet them with all seriousness."[64] On the other, is the fear that America's

[64] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 235.

very lifestyle is at risk, subject to decline and the machinations of foreign powers desirous to see the downfall of the United States and to transfer its wealth toward their own safety, security, and well-being. In this case, there may be an active and energetic attempt to forestall decline, deferring relaxation and the sweetness of prosperity, attempting to revamp civic morality, resulting in a hypersensitivity toward real or perceived dangers and the inclination to meet these dangers with determined zeal—and wedded to all this, the notion of a divine mandate and Providence.

With the ascendancy of the neoconservatives and the Christian Right and their influence on American public policy comes the notion of building a Christian America as a bulwark against Secular-Humanist Europe, the Axis of Evil, and the mislabeled Islamo-Fascist threat. For many of the Christian Right, Europe's unification into the European Union is seen as the initial stage of the revival of the Neo-Roman Empire and its seat of the Anti-Christ. Christian "conspiracists," for instance, proved highly influential in galvanizing a large segment of believers and, ultimately, ushering in the administration of George W. Bush. As historian Robert Alan Goldberg explains:

> Christian conspiracists set the pace and tone for this new great awakening. With televangelist Pat Robertson playing a critical role, they infused the call for personal salvation—and often overwhelmed it—with the cry of conspiracy. Borrowing from the dogma of the secular countersubversives, the Christian crusaders gave the plot a spiritual spin. America, awash in sin, had betrayed its calling and fallen away from the Lord. Its leaders had sacrificed national sovereignty to the antichrist and sworn allegiance to Satan's New World Order. To mobilize the faithful they stroked the belief in exceptionalism, distrust of government, and a sense of national decline. The imminence of the millennium spurred them to greater spiritual and secular effort, and they succeeded in advancing their cause from the periphery to the center of American politics and society.[65]

[65] Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67; see also, Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in*

Key to their agenda, then, is how a Christian United States, as the singular agent of the divine, can defeat Satan's plan of One-World government, a seemingly futile and contradictory understanding of biblical prophecy—the logical outcome of a literal interpretation of the Scriptures—in that the scriptures, paradoxically, state: "thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6: 10). Additionally, the more recent threat posed by the so-called "Axis of Evil," that is, North Korea and Iran (and to a significant degree, the erstwhile member, Iraq), along with the threat of radical Islamic terrorism, can be understood in similar prophetic terms, as harbingers of Armageddon.

In a recent work, Samuel Huntington offers three conceptual alternatives available to American political society.[66] These concepts are important not only for how American's understand themselves and their role in the world, but also how the world views America and Americans. As Huntington argues, "Americans can embrace the world, that is, open their country to other peoples or cultures, or they can try to reshape those other peoples and cultures in terms of American values, or they can maintain their society and culture distinct from those of other peoples."[67] The first Huntington labels the "cosmopolitan" concept, in which the United States comes to embody a highly pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic social environ, in which "diversity is a prime if not the prime value."[68] A second conceptual alternative is an imperial conception of America, in which American post-Cold War hegemony offers both America and the

---

Contemporary America, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 52ff; cf., Pat Robertson, *The New World Order,* 3ff.

[66] Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 362ff.

[67] Ibid., 362.

[68] Ibid., 363.

world the opportunity to both reshape and conform, respectively, to universal norms embodied by the United States. "According to the universalist belief," argues Huntington, "the people of other societies have basically the same values as Americans, or if they do not have them, they want to have them, or if they do not want to have them, they misjudge what is good for their society, and Americans have the responsibility to persuade them or induce them to embrace the universal values that America espouses."[69] The latter crosses into political messianism at odds with "old school" conservativism's aversion to activist social change.

Lastly is the concept of American "nationalism" and its impact on American identity. Whereas the first two conceptual alternatives seek to ameliorate the differences between the United States and the rest of the world, nationalism maintains American differences from the rest of the world as its strength, a difference predicated largely on its Anglo-Protestant heritage. Religiosity is the source of so much of America's understanding of itself. This religiosity, in turn, "leads Americans to see the world in terms of good and evil to a much greater extent than others do."[70] As the United States' position in the world grew in the post-Cold War era, so did the tensions placed on its identity, particularly the notion of American exceptionalism, an exceptionalism understood in terms of Manichean dualism of good and evil. The United States came to be seen as the embodiment of sacred truth, and in the words of Ronald Reagan, a "city set on a hill," while the Soviet Union and the communist ideology came to embody an "evil empire."

---

[69] Ibid., 364.

[70] Ibid., 365.

While Huntington's concepts are useful in classifying America's identity and role in the world, they should not be construed as mutually exclusive. Indeed, national identity and imperialism feed on one another, as American exceptionalism and its preeminent position in the world facilitate the imposition of sectarian beliefs. This is no more readily seen than in the ascendancy of an idealistic foreign policy among staunch anti-communist, conservative elites, one in which a realistic foreign policy, or the *realpolitik* of the Kissinger era, came to be seen undermining America's mission (*to wit*, destiny) in the world. Kissinger's policy of *détente*, or the easing of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, for instance, provided America's enemies with the opportunity to regain their strategic advantage in their aggressive, expansionist scheme of global domination. Moreover, such notions of peaceful coexistence with America's enemies could be seen as a sign of weakness, not indicative of America's power or preeminent role in world affairs. Hence, Kissinger engendered considerable hostility among anti-communist conservatives.

It was Ronald Reagan's administration that reframed the struggle against global communism in Manichean terms of good and evil. For the hard-liners in the Reagan administration, peaceful coexistence between the two diametrically opposed systems was tantamount to surrender on the part of the West. The struggle, or rather, the crusade against the "evil" Soviet empire demanded rolling-back Soviet gains, with the primary goal of American foreign policy being nothing less than extending the "blessings of liberty" to every man, woman and child on the face of the earth.[71]

---

[71] See Ronald Reagan, "On the Frontier of Liberty," Address delivered to the Conservative Political Action Conference, February 11, 1988.

With Reagan, then, the early Cold War American policy of active "containment," or containing Soviet expansion by way of a series of political, economic and security alliances, deterrence, or the maintenance of a large military and nuclear-weapon arsenal to deter adverse behavior, along with Nixon's and Kissinger's *détente*, gave way to out-right confrontation with the Soviet Union (albeit through "proxy" wars), confrontation geared heavily on ideological grounds and intent on rolling back Soviet gains. As Raymond R. Garthoff writes, "what would later come to be called the Reagan Doctrine had been espoused, resurrecting a policy of the 'rollback' of communist rule. The measured, if tough, policy framework seeking dialogue and negotiation [i.e., under *détente*] … seemed to have disappeared."[72] In its place, the idealistic neoconservative agenda of the righteous crusade against the "Evil Empire" found sympathetic cadres in Reagan's administration[73]—as well as the administration of George W. Bush, where the "Evil Empire" was superseded by the "Axis of Evil."

The ending of the Cold War, however, did little to placate the idealism of conservative hardliners. Despite the demise of Soviet Union, the United States, in the view of view of Robert Kagan and William Kristol, squandered its "unipolar moment," that is, the moment declared by George H. W. Bush as the "new world order," by failing to secure a "unipolar era," or an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity built on the principles of liberal, democratic, free-market capitalism.[74] The blame squarely rested on

---

[72] Raymond R. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*, Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1994), 127; See also Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, no. 1 (1990/1991).

[73] Ibid., 249.

[74] Robert Kagan and William Kristol eds., *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 6; Prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, the *Washington Post* reported that candidate George W. Bush considered Clinton's classification

the Clinton administration, marked not only by the easing of tensions with America's ideological competitors (such as China, now labeled a "strategic partner"), but also by its complacency in matters of foreign affairs, particularly in regard to defense spending.[75] The "present danger," they argue, "is that the United States, the world's dominant power on whom the maintenance of international peace and the support of liberal democratic principles depends, will shrink its responsibilities and—in a fit of absentmindedness, or parsimony, or indifference—allow the international order it created and sustains to collapse."[76] Or as William J. Bennett argues, "Today America sits at the summit … it would be tragic indeed if we did not use this extraordinary historical moment to promote the ideals at the heart of our national enterprise and, by so doing, take the steps that will ensure stability and the steady growth of freedom throughout the world."[77]

Neoconservatives openly crossed from the mere theoretical or academic activities into foreign policy formulation with the creation of the Washington D.C. based think tank The Project for the New American Century in 1997. For members of the Project for the New American Century, such as Robert Kagan, William Kristol, Richard Pearle, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Gary Bauer, William J. Bennett, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Eliot A. Cohen, I. Lewis ("Scooter") Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, et al., American idealism is a realistic attitude. Though they speak in terms of the interests of the state,

---

of China as a "strategic partner" a mistake and that rather, China should be considered a "strategic competitor" in what has been construed as an attempt to maintain the foreign policy dualism initiated by Ronald Reagan (Thomas W. Lippman, Washington Post Staff Writer, Friday, August 20, 1999; Page A9).

[75] See, Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century,* September 2000, http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf.

[76] Kagan, *Present Dangers*, 4.

[77] Bennett, *Present Dangers*, ed. Kagan, 304-305.

realpolitik has no place in a global environment characterized by ideological conflict—much less the coming struggle with radicalized Islam.[78] Rather, American power in the service of upholding and disseminating specific American values, such as the "blessings of liberty," became the *modus operandi*. Their idealistic foreign policy agenda gained justification and intensified after the attacks of September 11, 2001. This idealism contains the straightforward dualism of good versus evil and extends this dualism to perceived sponsors of state-led terrorism (e.g., Iraq, Iran and Syria) and to the mercurial terrorist organization labeled al-Qaeda. For instance, in a letter to President George W. Bush dated September 20, 2001, Project members wrote the following:

> We agree with Secretary of State Powell's recent statement that Saddam Hussein "is one of the leading terrorists on the face of the Earth…." It may be that the Iraqi government provided assistance in some form to the recent attack on the United States. But even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism. The United States must therefore provide full military and financial support to the Iraqi opposition. American military force should be used to provide a "safe zone" in Iraq from which the opposition can operate. And American forces must be prepared to back up our commitment to the Iraqi opposition by all necessary means.[79]

Or again, in a letter to the president dated April 3, 2002:

> We urge you to accelerate plans for removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. As you have said, every day that Saddam Hussein remains in power brings closer the day when terrorists will have not just airplanes with which to attack us, but chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, as well. It is now common knowledge that Saddam, along with Iran, is a funder and supporter of terrorism against Israel. Iraq has harbored terrorists such as Abu Nidal in the past, and it maintains links to the Al Qaeda network. If we do not move against Saddam Hussein and his regime, the damage our Israeli friends and we have suffered until

---

[78] See Project for the New American Century, "Statement of Principles," (June 3, 1997), http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm.

[79] Project for the New American Century, "Letter to President Bush on the War on Terrorism," (September 20, 2001), http://www.newamericancentury.org/Bushletter.htm.

> now may someday appear but a prelude to much greater horrors. Moreover, we believe that the surest path to peace in the Middle East lies not through the appeasement of Saddam and other local tyrants, but through a renewed commitment on our part, as you suggested in your State of the Union address, to the birth of freedom and democratic government in the Islamic world.[80]

America's preeminent position in the world, that of a nation upholding life and liberty, and the capitalist way of life, provides the only respite for a world succumbing to a new ideology of evil and teetering on destruction. And again, any attempt at peaceful coexistence with America's enemies, even a thoughtful consideration of diplomacy, could be construed as a sign of American weakness. Hence, the United States' position of power, that of global hegemon, stood as the only bulwark against an ideology that embraced "tyranny and death as a cause and a creed." [81] Moreover, this dualism fit in with the Christian fundamentalists' understanding of world affairs, most notably, eschatologically as Satan's unfolding plan of one-world government discerned within the Middle Eastern autocracies (e.g., Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a "New Babylon") and in Islamic terrorist organizations, thereby bolstering the alliance between the neoconservatives and the Religious Right.

America's global hegemony is thus a contributing factor to its very identity, and its identity, that is, the self-interpretation of American society in terms of a unique destiny, a contributing factor in its drift into immanentism. With American dominance under challenge from both allies (e.g. France and Germany), strategic rivals (e.g., China, Iran, and Russia), and intractable criminal and global terrorist organizations, Americans,

---

[80] Project for the New American Century, "Letter to President Bush on Israel, Arafat and the War on Terrorism," (April 3, 2002), http://www.newamericancentury.org/Bushletter-040302.htm.

[81] Ibid.; see also George W. Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, January 29th, 2002.

much like the South in the Reconstruction era, have increasingly come to see themselves in terms of a God-fearing nation under siege by a world in which God has no place (e.g., much of Western Europe, China, North Korea, and to a lesser degree Russia) and those nations in which religious fanaticism poses a very real existential threat (e.g., a nuclear–armed Iran or Pakistan under Islamist leadership).

In addition, there is a sizable portion of the planet living in a state of mere subsistence, with America's best intentions in these areas lost in the realities of what is perceived as neo-imperialism—creating a backlash against globalization. As Robert Kaplan explains:

> We are entering a bifurcated world. Part of the globe is inhabited by Hegel's and Fukuyama's Last Man, healthy, well fed, and pampered by technology. The other, larger part is inhabited by Hobbes's First Man, condemned to a life that is "poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[82]

What is more, armed resistance is increasingly the *modus operandi* for organized groups of First Men, whether Chechen rebels, Colombian Narco-terrorists, Indonesian or Somali pirates, Mexican drug cartels (also in the business of smuggling humans into the United States), al-Qaeda, and so forth. Kaplan adds: "a large number of people on this planet, to whom the comfort and stability of a middle-class life is utterly unknown, find war and barracks existence a step up rather than a step down."[83] Indeed, September 11, 2001 proved that some of these people live and are barracked within American society. As such, it is easy for American political society, founded as it was by Puritans seeking to escape the evils of the Old World, to fall into an "us vs. them" and an "enemy within" mindset. The tangible result of this orientation can be seen in the United States' national

[82] Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," 60.

[83] Ibid., 72.

security strategy: "The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests. The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better."[84] It is not enough to be the global policeman; America's safety is predicated on making the world better, or in other words, building a world in the image of American political, economic, and social institutions, or the truth of American society. Such a strategy on the part of the United States has only inflamed tensions on the world scene, thus giving credence to Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilizations, a far cry from an "end of history."

AMERICA AS THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS?

While neoconservativism as a whole did not seek, in the words of Garry Dorrien, to "restore a real or imagined *conservativism* of the past" (emphasis mine), its alliance with traditional conservatives, the Religious Right, and libertarians in the name of political opportunism does reveal a project to revive what is viewed as a "golden age" of American social, economic, and technological progress—a *status quo ante*. But this was not all: the alliance, in effect, initiated the contrivance of a *theologia civilis*, ostensibly to revive what amounted to a golden age of American virtue, a virtue lost with the rise of the modern, liberal state. The key to this contrivance was American Protestantism; and built around this Protestantism was a new, or perhaps revived, myth structure, that gave American society meaning and purpose and assisted in this society's own self-interpretation of itself. As we have seen, however, the Christian experience, much like the life of reason, is an arduous, heroic experience, predicated on faith, and is most

[84] White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002.

readily associated with the austere, humble life of the pilgrim. Recall that the Christian pilgrimage is one of both journey and a purpose (i.e., movement), with the end being the state of supernatural perfection, a transfiguration, based on a transcendent truth. This perfection, however, is in the next life, or rather, a divinely transfigured structure of reality, not in this one. This leads to the two important characteristics concerning immanentist movements, each springing from the corruption of Christian symbolism: that of "movement" (teleological) and that of a self-evident truth (axiological). Immanentism twists these symbols into the understanding that the movement toward truth will, inevitably, culminate in perfection in the material world—an end of history. The transfer of these Christian symbols to the mundane sphere of existence, in this case, to the United States, in order to construct a viable civil theology for the American public, gives to American society a meaning and purpose in the unfolding of history, built upon eternal or "self-evident" truths.[85] In each of these two aspects, the United States crosses into the realm of immanentism, in that, the truth of American society is carried over into a perceived historical mission to perfect not only American society (the *sine qua non* for the divine mandate), but also the perfection of the world. Added to this mix are the millennialist expectations that developed in American Protestantism which added an element of immediacy concerning God's plan for humanity and the necessity for God's agents to move quickly to fulfill this plan. And from this results the political messianism so much at odds with Burkian-styled conservative thought.

In terms of electoral politics, George W. Bush's courting of the religious right in order to gain political advantage was a carefully calculated strategy to co-opt a significant

[85] Cf., Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 186ff.

portion of the American electorate, that is, the "moral values" voter, in order to gain political advantage. But a much grander project can be postulated here. Much as Hobbes saw the need to put his social model into practice to limit the religious passions so destructive to the public order of his time, one must consider to what extent the "values" campaign of contemporary American political experience is one aspect of the attempt to craft an American civil theology in order to maintain public harmony in the face of the breakdown of spirituality in the American public sphere. Hobbes writes, for instance: "I recover some hope that one time or other this writing of mine may fall into the hands of a sovereign who will consider it himself (for it is short, and I think clear) without the help of any interested or envious interpreter; and by the exercise of entire sovereignty, in protecting the public teaching of it, convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice."[86] So it can be adduced that political strategists the likes of Karl Rove and those initiated into an esoteric, intellectual elite, that is, the neoconservatives, saw themselves in a similar position: in order to maintain American hegemony across of a number of variables, these elites consciously strove to reshape the spiritual content of American political society—including what we would consider its civil religion and its public theology. Whereas Rove's focus was on electoral politics and securing majorities in the United States House of Representatives and Senate, and eventually, the presidency, the neoconservatives took the morality campaign even further, building a new myth structure around a Manichean dualism of good and evil. Their targets were, first, the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire," then, the "Axis of Evil" of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—and one might add, the threat posed by Islamic terror groups. Nonetheless, while the

[86] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 31, p. 408; see also Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 217-218.

neoconservatives, as Straussians, were under the impression that they alone had the necessary knowledge of what is best for American society--that they were America's "Guardians"--they lacked the intellectual acumen of Hobbes in their attempt to shore up American political society. Rather, their project resulted in a gross caricature of the older American republic and brought about the unintended consequence of fueling immanentism in the one political society that for so long had resisted such tendencies. Specifically, the attempt to craft a civil theology which would be a restoration of the older, traditional American civil religion in effect resulted in the unintended consequences of an orthodoxy of a sectarian Protestant community drifting toward radical elements of Christian eschatology and a unique American immanentism: America's Judeo-Protestant roots along with its commitment to constitutional-democracy and the free market system comprise the *axiological* components of the "truth" of American society,[87] while the course toward the Millennium and America's redeemer-nation status reveal its *teleological* components. In this way, American immanentism crosses from mere progressivism and idealism and takes on an activist form of immanentism. Thus, in the display of self-styled profundity on the part of a highly influential cadre of conservative intellectuals, America became the "measure of all things," and in their intransigent quest to secure the twenty-first century as the "American century," their objective inevitably morphed into re-making the world as "America writ large."[88]

---

[87] One may add a "value-free" science as a measurement of the efficiency, effectiveness, and predictability of its social, economic and public policies and institutions.

[88] For an account of this transformation from a globalization perspective, see Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

CONCLUSION

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION RECONSIDERED

Madness is something rare in individuals—but in groups, parties, peoples, ages, it is the rule.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

In this final assessment, that of the world as America writ large, along with the corollary of "America as the measure of all things," America's immanentist implications become clear. The republican regime that characterized the United States in its early history embodied a distinct and unique civil theology, one that fused state and society, public and private, citizen and community, into an organic whole reminiscent of Aristotle's natural polis. While not identical with a republic in the classical sense, the United States wedded classical republicanism to a new time and place. "In the United States," Tocqueville writes,

> the beauty of virtue is almost never promoted. It is considered useful and this is proved daily. American moralists do not claim that one must sacrifice oneself for one's fellows because it is a fine thing to do but they are bold enough to say that such sacrifices are as necessary to the man who makes them as to those gaining from them.[1]

Virtue in this sense was not wholly second nature as in classical republican theory, but rather could be considered functional or even utilitarian, in that is served to maintain a strong sense of civil association among the American people. Self-interest, in this sense,

---

[1] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 610.

was self-interest "rightly understood";[2] that is, American's do not deny that each individual can or should pursue their own self-interests, but rather, Americans were "quite willing to show how enlightened self-love continually leads them to help one another and inclines them to devote part of their time and wealth to the welfare of the state."[3] American civil religion developed out of this social environment by fusing the public and private sphere into a meaningful whole, while allowing private religious beliefs and values to exist without drifting off into radical manifestations. Civil religion gave purpose and direction to American political society while maintaining a degree of fallibility and finitude inherent in America's "experimental" temperament.

As we have seen however, modernity and the liberal state steadily displaced the republican regime and, as a result, the traditional ties that sustained a strong sense of community in American political society atrophied under the strain of excessive individualism. This in itself was not unforeseen. "As social equality spreads," Tocqueville warns,

> there are more and more people who … have acquired or have preserved sufficient understanding and wealth to be able to satisfy their own needs. Such people owe nothing to anyone and, as it were, expect nothing from anyone. They are used to considering themselves in isolation and quite willingly imagine their destiny as entirely in their own hands. … It constantly brings them back to themselves and threatens in the end to imprison them in the isolation of their own hearts.[4]

The liberal state vastly increased wealth and individual liberty for many Americans, but in the end it left America's spiritual needs largely unfulfilled and, in certain respects, unfulfillable. Moreover, the liberal emphasis on tolerance opened up a vast range of

---

[2] Ibid., 609ff.

[3] Ibid., 611.

[4] Ibid., 589.

spiritual preferences and differing means of fulfillment--a market-place, of sorts, of spiritual goods and services. Under such a regime, civil religion in America, at least in its older form, is of dubious value: the state is merely a neutral entity that allows its citizens to go about securing their self-chosen paths to happiness and fulfillment within a minimum framework of law. Nonetheless, as we have seen, a political society cannot exist without a spiritual core of sorts—whether it be a transcendent, divine measure or the divinization of society—and much that can be construed as political theorizing in the Western world was in reality attempts to fill the vacuum of atrophied religious symbols with robust symbols. In the United States, where such a vacuum was long absent due to its unique and distinct civil theology, civil religion eventually took on the characteristic of a contrived project as with other past attempts. While no single American theorist stands out in this development as in Hobbes does in seventeenth-century England, there is a school of thought that can be identified as crucial, namely the anti-modern theorists associated with Leo Strauss, the neoconservatives. For the neoconservatives, such notions as truth and justice have an equivocal quality in that such concepts can vary from circumstance to circumstance and can apply differently from social group to social group, social role to social role, generation to generation, and so forth. As Strauss writes, "In extreme situations there may be conflicts between what the self-preservation of society requires and the requirements of commutative and distributive justice. In such situations, the public safety is the highest law."[5] Together with the broader conservative movement in the United States, the aggregate of their philosophic enterprise has contributed to a project similar to that of Hobbes's authoritarian construction. In order to maintain peace

[5] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 160.

and concord in American political society, Judeo-Christianity was adapted as the civil theology for American society.

All the same, these theorists, political strategists, and American "statesmen," lacked the acumen and perspicacity of Hobbes. Whereas Hobbes took great care in his theoretical construct, stripping Protestant Christianity of its more dangerous immanentist implications, the recent American case appears to be one in which the immanentist implication remain intact, thus allowing the United States to acquiesce into what Schlesinger refers to as its "destiny" stream of thought. And whereas Hobbes took great care to create a new view of man as man, a man with an eye on individualistic, mundane or material gratification, the current project makes no overt attempt to create or restore a spiritual view of man; the Hobbesian view of man remains essentially intact—which in itself is the source of so much of the modern world's difficulties, with America's "winner-take-all" society the most egregious example. "The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, as of all other things," is for the contemporary political actors, essentially the same as with Hobbes: that which can be commanded in a market-like setting and the value one brings to an organization, a firm, and so forth. Individual worth becomes his or her price (or value) in a market-oriented society. The Individual's "Price," that is to say, individual worth, is merely as "much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute [as it would be under a true classical or Christian understanding of man]; but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another."[6] The model for man and society remains essentially the same for Hobbes' contemporary beneficiaries as it was for Hobbes himself: that of a bourgeois market society. In this sense, the attempt

[6] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 151-152.

that has been made is one of rolling-back America to an overly romanticized vision of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American *laissez-faire* capitalism, a period in which the United States achieved significant but uneven and inequitable economic growth. The binding element of political society, the *religāre* in Aquinas's sense, is then, less a genuine concern for the current regime than the freeing of financial interests from governmental constraints and the natural corollary of interest group politics, political expediency. In fact, one may argue that the binding element is further loosened, with the market economy rewarding economic actors that contribute little in terms of the overall health of the economy—and the new social characters for society, that is, those figures by which members of society orient themselves in ethical terms, no longer figures like Benjamin Franklin (with such notions as "early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy, and wise," and "a penny saved is a penny earned"), but rather, twisted notions of Horatio Alger's "American Dream," in which moguls like Donald Trump and "artists" such as P. Diddy and even Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton become the models for many Americans (with such notions as "he who dies with the most toys wins" and "get rich or die trying" the *modus operandi* for many).[7] While neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol may have expressed an aversion to unfettered capitalism, their throwback to a vanishing America actually reinforced the spirit-sapping capitalism so much at the root of America's drift toward relativism and a radical individualism.

As a final point, under current conditions, this project has taken on the added mission to reshape the world in America's image. But the administration of George W.

[7] Erich Fromm describes the social character as "the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group" in *Character and the Social Process*, Appendix to *Fear of Freedom*, (Routledge, 1942); see also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 27-31 and 73.

Bush insists that the United States will not use its strength for "unilateral advantage";[8] nor will there be a civilizational war, or a war on Islam, for instance: "When it comes to common rights there is no clash of civilizations…the peoples of the Islamic world want and deserve the same and opportunities of as people in every nation."[9] American power, then, will be used to promote political and economic freedom for all peoples and all cultures. Nonetheless, the overt intention remains the same. In order to secure peace and concord on the global scene, America's national security strategy is predicated upon a world as America writ large, and with this, the circle is complete; America's "destiny" is established.

One scarcely has to comment on the corruption plaguing both American public and private intuitions, both on Capital Hill and Wall Street, but also in those religious institutions instrumental in keeping such corruption in check. Corruption, we have seen, is the bane of republics. The civil religion once so vital to limiting malfeasance at the broader level, as well as destructive behavior at the individual level, no longer fulfills its function. Likewise, the revitalization project that engendered a new civil theology, or at least the attempt to engender a new one, has not assuaged the corrupting tendencies of the modern liberal state and its bourgeois culture. Neoconservatives, such as Fukuyama for instance, seek to revitalize American society in language familiar with a market–oriented society. That is, in order to build "trust" in American society, "social capital" becomes

---

[8] White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* September 2002.

[9] Bush, George W., "War on Terror Will Not Be Won on the Defensive", Remarks by the President at the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy, June 1, 2002.

the object, or rather the policy-prescription *de jour*.[10] Nevertheless, as Kristol points out (and Fukuyama would certainly agree), a capitalist society leaves much to be desired in terms of a spiritually robust society. Spiritual disorder can be understood as the root of so much of the world's existential crises, with the concept of "trust"—or rather, "social capital"—doing little to ameliorate the tensions within a society undergoing significant spiritual disorder. Hence, American conservative intellectuals, though quite aware of the problems involved, have not risen to the occasion, but rather have obfuscated and exasperated the problem, initiating a unique American immanentism. Perhaps Nietzsche's portrait of modernity as a "Madman" offers insight into the modern American "philosophic" foray to reclaim spiritual order:

> Do we not smell anything of God's decomposition? … God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was the holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off of us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festival of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not become gods to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us—for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto."[11]

American conservatives, to be sure, recognized the crisis confronting American political society as such and the scale of the "deed" set before them; but in their course to right what they perceived to be a foundering society, they crossed-over into a realm of immanentist perfection and human self-salvation. For neoconservatives God is indeed

---

[10] Fukuyama, Francis. Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity, (New York: Free Press Paperback, 1997) and The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order, (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[11] Fredrick Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, in Walter Kauffman, *The Portable Nietzsche*, (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 96.

dead, so we must prop up an imposture in his place. In this way neoconservativism brought home that which had hitherto been primarily a continental European phenomenon, namely, ideologically driven politics—and to a significant degree, that which Strauss, among others, labored to resist. Millennial driven Protestantism only exacerbated this trend; its theologians lost sight of Christianity's humble roots and chose instead a path towards the transformation of American society, instant material gratification, and a direct rout of the tribulations that, paradoxically, were soon to ensue: if heaven could not be brought down to Earth, at least God's agents can help pave the way to the final destination.

In a country founded on the notion of *novus ordo seclorum*, perhaps the political messianism described herein was inevitable. Here exists the logical outcome of theological artifice and naiveté in full-blown proportion. Both neoconservatives and the Religious Right are complicit and no doubt should be held in accountable for the errancy of their theological construction. The perceived spiritual disorder they attempted to ameliorate has only been magnified, perhaps to all new levels and in perverse new directions. If there can be any saving grace to the contemporary American crisis, it is that the neoconservative attempt to address this spiritual disorder is but one voice, albeit highly influential, among others in the din and cacophony of a hyper-pluralist political environment and an equally dissonant academic environment. But this is cold comfort. Their project to make the twenty-first century the "American century" modeled after a neo-Reaganite view of the United States has yielded consequences not entirely in line with their statement of principles: "We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan Administration's success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both

present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities."[12] It appears that this throwback is out of place and out of time, a model no longer prepared to meet the contingencies of a highly fragmented, if not anarchic, sectarian-charged post-Cold War or post-911 world. The Bush Doctrine, for one, has engendered resistance to American principles abroad and has called into question America's global responsibilities. Likewise on the domestic front: the restorative agenda has done little to arrest moral decline and appears to have only exacerbated the condition in a much more radical way—it has energized a highly radical Protestant base expecting, and in certain cases, facilitating, the Millennial reign of God's kingdom, with the United States in the vanguard and representing this transcendent truth for all time. It is Voegelin who reminds us of the dangers inherent in such a corruption of Christian eschatology, a corruption that inevitably distorts reality itself and invariably affects concrete public policy. Speaking of such theorists he writes: "in so far as they apply their fallacious constructions to concrete social problems, they misinterpret the structure of immanent reality. The eschatological interpretation of history results in a false picture of reality; and errors with regard to the structure of reality have practical consequences when the false conception is made the basis of political action."[13] So the United States drifts from its less-than pretentious republican origins toward its own "Machiavellian moment," its experimental quality out of sight, its limitations and fallibility out of mind—*Sic transit gloria mundi.*

---

[12] Project for the New American Century, "Statement of Principles," http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm.

[13] Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*, 223.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barker, John Marshal. *The Social Gospel and the New Era*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919.

Barkun, Michael. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Barnes. Jonathan. *Early Greek Philosophy*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

Bell, Daniel. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.* New York: Basic Books, 1996.

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *Dædalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

_____. "Religious Evolution." *American Sociological Review* 29, no. 3 (June 1964): 358-374.

Bellah, Robert N. and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. New York, Harper and Row, 1980.

Berlet, Chip. "Christian Identity: The Apocalyptic Style, Political Religion, Palingenesis, and Neo-Fascism," in *Fascism, Totalitarianism, and Political Religion,* Roger Griffen ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Bork, Robert H. *Slouching Toward Gomorrah.* New York: Regan Books, 2003.

Burke, Edmund. *A Vindication of Natural Society: or, a View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind from every Species of Artificial Society,* ed. Frank N. Pagano. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1982.

_____. *Select Works of Edmund Burke, 3 vols. (Payne ed.)* (1874-1878), Volume II: Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).

_____. *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians,* in *The Works of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*. London: Rivington, 1812.

_____. *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws,* in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1981.

Carmody, John, and Denise Lardner Carmody. *Interpreting the Religious Experience*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1987.

Diamond, Sara. *Roads to Dominion: Right-wing Movements and Political Power in the United States.* New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

_____. *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1989.

Dorrien, Gary. *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

_____. *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Drury, Shadia B. "Leo Strauss," in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998.

Drury, S.B. ""Leo Strauss's Classic Natural Right Teaching," *Political Theory* 15, no. 3, (August 1987): 299-315.

Easton, David. *The Political System*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Elazar, Daniel. *The American Constitutional* Tradition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

Etzioni, Amitai. *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Fesler, James W. and Donald F. Kettl. *The Politics of the Administrative Process.* Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House, 1996.

Fineman, Howard. "Bush and God," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003.

Frank Robert H. and Philip J. Cook. *The Winner-Take-All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than the Rest of Us*. New York: Penguin, 1996.

Fredrickson, H. George. "Toward a New Public Administration," in Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, *Classics of Public Administration.* Belmont CA: Thompson-Wadsworth, 2004.

Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" in *America and the World,* Gideon Rose ed. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002.

_____. *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order.* New York: Free Press, 1999.

_____. "Second Thoughts: the Last Man in a Bottle." *The National Interest* 56, (Summer 1999): 16-33.

_____. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity.* New York: Free Press Paperback, 1997.

Goldberg, Robert Alan. *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Hauerwas, Stanley M.. *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds. Duram: Duke University Press, 2001.

Hayek, F.A. *The Constitution of Liberty.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

_____. "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review* 5, no. 4, 519-530.

Hewitt, Hugh. *Painting the Map Red: The Fight to Create a Permanent Republican Majority.* Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2006.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. MacPherson. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988.

Hunter, James Davison. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Huntington, Samuel P. "A Clash of Civilizations." *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

_____. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1996.

_____. "Conservativism as an Ideology." *The American Political Science Review* 51 (June 1957): 454-473.

_____. "The Lonely Superpower." *Foreign Affairs* 78 (March/April 1999): 35-49.

_____. "Paradigms of American Politics: Beyond the One, the Two, and the Many." *Political Science Quarterly* 89 (March 1974): 1-26.

_____. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

Jardine, Murray. "Eric Voegelin's Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin's Therapeutic Analysis." *The Review Of Politics* 57 (1995): 581-605.

_____. *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004.

Jowett, B. *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 5, 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1891.

Kagan, Robert and William Kristol. *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000.

Kaplan, Robert D. "The Coming Anarchy", *The Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2, (February 1994): 44-76.

_____. "Supremacy By Stealth", *The Atlantic Monthly* 292, no. 1, (July/August 2003): 67-83.

Keniston, Kenneth. *The Uncommitted.* New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1960.

Kimbal, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Dangerous: Five Warning Signs*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke To Eliot*. Washington D.C.: Regnery, 1986.

Kristol, Irving. *Neo-Conservativism: The Autobiography of an Idea*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 1st Elephant Paperback edition, 1999.

_____. "The Neoconservative Persuasion," *The Weekly Standard* 8, Issue 47 (August 26, 2003).

_____. *Two Cheers for Capitalism.* New York: Basic Books, 1978.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Lasswell, Harold D. *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How?* New York: Whittlesey House, 1936.

Lindblom, Charles. "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review* 19 (Spring 1995): 79-88.

Lowi, Theodore J. *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969.

Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964.

March James G. and Herbert A. Simon. *Organizations.* New York: Wiley, 1958.

MacIver, R.M. *The Web of Government.* New York: The Free Press, 1965.

MacIntyre, Aladaire. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Virtue.* 2nd ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Macpherson, C.B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke.* Oxford University Press, 1961.

McAllister, Ted V. *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order.* Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1996.

McClelland, J.M. *A History of Western Political Thought.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Mannheim Karl. *Ideology and Utopia.* New York: Harvest Books, 1936.

March, James G. and Herbert A. Simon. *Organizations.* New York: Wiley, 1958.

Micklethwait, John and Adrian Wooldridge. *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America.* New York: Penguin, 2005.

Moore, R. Lawrence. *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Nye, Joseph. "The Changing Nature of World Power." *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 177-192.

Oakeshott, Michael. *Hobbes on Civil Association*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1975.

_____. "On Being Conservative," in *The Portable Conservative Reader*. Russell Kirk ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1982

Phillips, Kevin. *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil and Borrowed Money*. New York: Viking, 2006.

Riesman, David, Nathan Glaser and Revel Denny. *The Lonely Crowd*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Publications, 1950.

Robbins, Thomas and Susan J. Palmer. *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Sandoz, Ellis. "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors." *The Journal of Politics* 34, no.1 (1972): 2-36.

_____. *The Vogelinian Revolution*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. *The Cycles in American History*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.

_____. *The Disuniting of America*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992.

Sigmund, Paul E. ed., *The Selected Political Writings of John Locke*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Smith, Gregory Bruce. "Leo Strauss and the Straussians: An Anti-Democratic Cult", *Political Science and Politics,* 30, no. 2 (June 1997): 180-189.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in J.H. Hexter ed., *The Traditions of Human Thought*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1968.

Strauss, Leo. *City and Man*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964.

_____. *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

_____. *Natural Right and History*. University of Chicago Press, 1953.

_____. "Progress or Return," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.

_____. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.

_____. "Three Waves of Modernity," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.

Talmon, J. L. *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1970.

Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Voegelin, Eric. *From Enlightenment to Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1975.

_____. "Industrial Society in Search of Reason", in Raymond Aron, ed., *World Technology and Human Destiny*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963.

_____. *The New Science of Politics,* in *Modernity Without Restraint,* ed. Manfred Henningsen. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

_____. *The Political Religions,* in *Modernity Without Restraint,* ed. Manfred Henningsen. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

_____. *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, in *Modernity Without Restraint,* ed. Manfred Henningsen. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

_____. "The Oxford Political Philosophers", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 3, (April, 1953): 97-114.

Waldo, Dwight. *The Administrative State: A Study of the Political Theory of American Public Administration* (New York: Ronald Press, 1948).

Weber, Max. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York: Free Pres, 1964.

Wildavsky, Aaron. "Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation." *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (1987): 3-21.

Wilson, Edward O. *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

_____. "Back From Chaos", *The Atlantic Monthly* 281, (March 1998): 41-62.

Wilson, Woodrow. "The Study of Administration", *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (June 1887): 197-222.

White House. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America.* September 2002.

Whyte, William. *Organization Man*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956.

Wolf Jr., Charles. *Markets or Government.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).