

© 2001 by Paul N. Goldstene

*Goldstene is a Professor of Government  
at California State University, Sacramento*

**Shallow Democracy:**

**The American Version**

by Paul N. Goldstene

*“The great hopes of the far-left wing of the French Enlightenment for a more equal and, accordingly, rational world now appear to be dashed upon the jagged shoals of a disappointing half century. Certainly, egalitarian values and attitudes expand, and those disposed to elitist claims feel pressured by many who are suddenly allowed to legitimately resist the entrenched position of family affiliation and privilege.*

*“What this really represents, however, is a strange twist on the democratic dream--a condition wherein the assertions of superior social position which are under assault are eagerly ingested by those who are the very catalyst of such an assault. At the same time the traditional configuration of labor versus capital dissolves as an augmented quantity of material wealth flows to people who toil throughout the day only to avidly search out the latest fluctuations of their stock portfolios at night. Moreover, the authority to make public decisions is no longer where it is supposed to be. Indeed, civic power is often depicted as being nowhere in particular--presumably dispersed into a uniquely liberal version of a pressure-group pluralism, even while the supposed*

*diversity of an entrepreneurial history is engulfed by the elite concentrations of a managerial and corporatist culture--a development barely discerned by a population entranced with the technological artifacts this culture so abundantly produces and glaringly acclaims. What may intrude upon some is a vaguely defined disaffection with the 'system' and a growing uncertainty about the official version of 'democratic' purpose. But, within the constellation of a controlling conformity, these are voices that are hardly heard and, when they are, that find little audience capable of progressive political effect."*

Ludwig von Kreplach, circa 1951 (from the translation by Felix R. Bloch)

\*\*\*\*\*

This is a country that lauds "individualism." Its inhabitants accordingly worry a great deal about whether an issue is truly "public" or "private" and, if found to be public, about what "collectivity," or level of government, should be awarded jurisdiction. Here the deepest inclinations of American majorities habitually favor the private over the public and, if public action is appropriate, for the most local authority deemed capable of addressing the problem. Thus, for instance, at-large elections for the presidency, the House of Representatives, or state legislatures have never been entertained as serious options in the United States. This is generally considered to be a reflection of the Jeffersonian preference for local supremacy, an echo of Jefferson's convictions about the prevailing good sense of the American people which, in terms of the Enlightenment roots of his ideas, really means the equal moral and, thereby, rational capacity of human beings. And, for many, such localism is more than a manifestation of democratic doctrine. It is held to be the paramount reality of the democratic experience in this country, that which distinguishes America from the history of Western Europe, to say nothing of the rest of the world.

Despite this, however, Jefferson would have understood that the contemporary acclaim for "localism" has accompanied a nearly consistent move to the right for many years, and that this does not represent momentum toward a more egalitarian order. It is unlikely he would have failed to comprehend the centralization of power and authority that American "conservatism" actually promotes--as well as the role of the economic interests that finance and benefit from it. Some have commented on the increasingly blatant domination of American politics by the great business corporations; others have even discerned the insinuation of a corporatist culture into the United States; none of it very "local" in its essential tendencies. But few attribute any of this to the logic of American "democracy" and its fundamental commitment to "individualism" as pecuniary ambition.

Of course, the domination of governmental policy by big business is nothing new and, in a certain sense, the present situation resembles that of the late-nineteenth century before the Progressive reaction manifested itself in the subsequent elections of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. And "democrats" might well contend that the egalitarian proclivities of the American people will respond again--as, in fact, they did during the 1960s. Still, from the point of view of corporate power, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and even the 1920s, was simplistic compared to what now exists. A far greater proportion of the labor force is directly or indirectly employed by gigantic bureaucratic structures--with all the attendant pulls on loyalty which this induces. That since the 1980s business enterprise has turned on workers with an enthusiasm worthy of the 1880s is true. It also may ease. Yet, whether it does or not, popular support for a "privately" corporatized system will probably remain strong precisely because the option of socialism is perceived to be a "foreign" idea, one which poses an "alien" threat to the integrity of the social fabric. Accompanied by the rhetoric of inevitability, the "peoples' capitalism" becomes more

firmly entrenched, along with its much-admired technological largesse.

In the endemic struggle between the expansionism of *gesellschaft* and the localism of *gemeinschaft* both have played a crucial role in American history, and each of these forces have bolstered the certainty that the United States is a democratic country. Such a portrayal is quite in harmony with the view that significant ideological conflicts are exhausted because they have been resolved within the Western world, and that the rest of humanity is soon to follow. In the 1950s this became articulated as “the end of ideology,” a theoretical penchant that grew out of research into “systems analysis” which determined that an essentially stable equilibrium typified the more “advanced” parts of the globe. All that remained was to tinker with the details within the accepted political parameters and to make minor adjustments in regard to policy consequences. This is an affirmation which is more recently voiced in the pronouncement that “liberal-democracy” manifests both the purpose and “the end of history,” although all that may have actually ended is any semblance of local control.

\*\*\*\*\*

To argue that there are discrete qualities to the history of a people who possess common loyalties, by whatever jurisdictional conception these loyalties may be defined, is well supported by the evidence. But “liberal-democracy” in the United States says far more than this. It resonates with the rhythms of a particular brand of national superiority known as “American exceptionalism.” Comparing the American experience to the ideological dialectic of liberalism and socialism in Europe, and inferring that its absence has saved this country from the unfortunate effects of class struggle, this more than suggests that the United States is unique in human history for having devised a civic configuration that works better for nearly everyone. In so doing, it justifies and declares permanent

the present foundations and organization of political authority, as well as the deeper realities of public power in the American system.

To be sure, the claims of nationalism are seldom static. In their earlier stage, those who consider themselves to compose a nation because they allegedly share a history, language, and culture set out to attain a state. Then, what has become a nation-state frequently embarks upon a mission to save or "civilize" the world, that is to make the planet or, at least, as much of it as possible, more like itself. Often referred to as nineteenth-century European nationalism, this is the phenomenon of nationalism in its more advanced phase. It characteristically finds expression through colonial, financial, or military expansion, or in any combination of these and, not surprisingly, a monetary imperialism supported by armed force is no stranger to the foreign policy of the United States. Or this phase may be articulated as an eager willingness to stand as an example for the rest of humanity to emulate. This more placid view, adhered to by, among others, Jefferson and Lincoln, contends that, at a minimum, that which is superior possesses an obligation to serve as a model for mankind.

Either portrayal locks into place the legal sovereignty and continuing good sense of American majorities. Moreover, it is proposed, the United States is inhabited by practical people who, overtly or implicitly, accept the assertion of Karl R. Popper--among numerous others--that anyone who holds an ideological position must be instilled with a touch of madness, which is then associated with an undesirable "extremism," or worse, "fanaticism." In this manner the order is frozen into a "democratic" formation. Still, it is not clear that those who contend that ideology has been ended, or that it never was a factor, are in concurrence about who actually rules--or that they would not dispute the essential ideological issue of who should.

Indeed, to pronounce, after the progressive surge of the New Deal, that ideological disagreement has been abolished or, following the further progressive developments of the 1960s, that history is now static, is to be empirically silly. "The end of ideology," so popular among the political intelligensia in the 1950s, abruptly evaporated as a cogent posture in the 1960s. It is not unreasonable to think that the current vogue of "the-end-of-history," which extolls corporate power in terms of the oxymoron of "liberal-democracy," will reach a similar conclusion because the pressures that lead to ideological transition will not simply go away.

Of course, there is much truth to the claim that stable political systems are grounded in fundamental compatibilities, and not in dissent. Yet those who maintain that ideology is no longer relevant are really asserting that a certain ideology has become so dominant that acceptance of it is overwhelmingly reflexive and finally beyond question. Accordingly, what "ends" is not ideology, and plainly not history, but any notable controversy about these matters, a trait of all stable political orders that, hopefully, should come as no surprise. One result is to label all who do not accept the standard ideological premises--whatever their content--as being driven by an "ideology" and, therefore, out of touch with reality, even though social reality is ultimately a reflection of the ideological conditioning that produces the "system" in the first place.

Moreover, from a theoretical perspective, to deny the stabilizing importance of ideology is to deprive political inquiry of a universal conception that addresses the issue of how political orders are formed and, concurrently, how to identify movements that are truly revolutionary--and to merely replace "ideology" with another word would, without a doubt, lead to the same result. All systems are expressions of a paramount ideology and any change that is not shallow must occur at this level. Ideologies, in turn, are normative. They derive from doctrines that have found wide support--and,

invariably, the broader the support the vaguer their substance becomes--allowing vociferous debate about their precise stipulations, but only on the edges, never at the center. Some refer to this as "the core values" of a society. Hegel depicts it as the prevailing *Volksgeist*, others, as the world view, or consciousness of a population although, unlike ideology and core values, these carry with them more than the normative content of a doctrine because they also denote systemically controlling perceptions of what presumably exists.

To add to the confusion, social myth can be usefully understood in a nearly identical manner. This too emerges from a doctrine that has become inordinately popular. Yet while myth, in this sense, is what people honestly think they believe, ideology is what they really believe. Hence, the test of myth is testimony; the test of ideology is observable action; and while myth and ideology may be in accord, they also may not.

Within "modern" systems the major civic activity in which most people engage, and which is publicly verifiable on an aggregate scale, is voting, and in the United States the discrepancies between what people report to those who conduct survey research and how they respond to ideological appeals that finally attract their vote are notable. To the extent they are being straightforward about what they orally convey, this strongly suggests that the myth that Americans predictably applaud is not the same as the ideology to which they actually adhere. In fact, the available data disclose that most people in the country reflexively favor democracy as a myth but are liberals in their ideological commitments and, furthermore, that they are usually unaware that these are fundamentally incompatible positions. Such a condition is not simply an example of Orwellian doublethink. What it more tellingly discloses are certain of the paramount contradictions that infuse the controlling consciousness of the nation.

In any event, it is ideology that, by definition, motivates human behavior, and to denigrate its vital role in this regard is to forego any effort to understand how historical forces create political orders and how they hold them together. And, importantly, it is to limit the focus of analysis to events that occur within a stipulated constellation of power and authority which, in itself, becomes an a priori and unchallengeable truth.

\*\*\*\*\*

All cultures, and the political systems they produce, are rooted in the need to confront the material realities of existence. Still, a great variety of governmental configurations evolve from this universal imperative. These are predicated upon a diversity of physical conditions, along with an impressive plurality of human responses to these conditions. Such responses eventuate in economic systems, as well as in the accepted theories, doctrines, myths, and ideologies that justify them. These, in turn, infiltrate those perceptions, values, and attitudes which coalesce into a prevailing consciousness and that tenaciously resist any fundamental criticisms of the economic arrangements which this consciousness reflects. Hence it is the material imperative which is causal to the enormous influence of tradition, inducing those habits of mind and behavior which, as William James points out, literally hold societies together. All of this establishes the sources of status and deference and, by extension, to whom, and in what arrangement and manner, power and political authority are appropriately delegated. Any disruption of a consensus of this kind is actually subversive of the ongoing order and inherently carries within itself the seeds of revolution.

It is in this sense that Louis Hartz can propose that America is a liberal nation because the principles enunciated by John Locke are so profoundly incorporated into its political culture that nothing else can be effectively visualized--for this country or for the world--a situation within which

all occasions of ideological disagreement become insignificant. But it should be noted that Hartz never contends that ideology has ended. On the contrary, his point is that one ideology is so supreme in the United States that other ideological formulations cannot even be comprehended. If, for Hartz, it is the ideology of liberalism that grounds and stabilizes an order supposedly devoid of the remnants of an earlier European history, for others it is the ideology of Jeffersonian democracy that is the historical basis of the American political system. In this rendition too, ideological conflict is found only on the "extremes" and is operationally trivial, coming either from disillusioned malcontents suffused with the "subversive" ideas of a European Left, or from the adherents of an equally European Right which allows no limits to the claims of political authority that flow from a sufficient acquisition of productive property.

The evidence abundantly indicates that Hartz is correct; that since before the consolidation of the country into a nation state through the catalyst of the Civil War, indeed, prior to the writing of the Constitution itself; the premier American agreements are most accurately understood as a manifestation of the liberal argument which begins to emerge in the England of the seventeenth century. Here the authority to rule is to be shared by those who populate a structure of rival capitalist entrepreneurs--a structure composed of the few who, allegedly, can best discern the rational and immutable laws of nature including, as made evident by their business fortunes, the natural laws of economics. Accordingly, people whose superior governing capacity is revealed by their personal material accumulation are to financially compete in a manner that automatically induces a system of "right rule" through a pluralistic working out of their differences at an elite level of engagement in the formulation and implementation of public policy. Or, more precisely, this yields an approximation of right rule which, in the liberal pantheon, is as near to it as human nature,

always driven by the passions that are counter to the exercise of reason, will allow. What results is a constrained elitism which always attends the liberal notion that liberty must lead to diversity, a profoundly progressive idea at the time of its inception because it greatly expanded the number of people considered to be meritorious enough to wield political authority.

Within this perspective the economic is elevated over the classical conception of the political which, no longer acclaimed as the highest calling of human beings, rapidly comes to be depicted as an inferior arena of human activity. Predicated upon the early liberal division of human existence into three great domains, those of the "private realms" of the personal and the economic, and the "public realm" of politics--and within which, as the liberal tradition matures, the personal is subsumed into the economic--the doctrine of the free market attains a philosophical pedigree that is in harmony with the newly "discovered" realities of human behavior. As always, consciousness is the road to ideology, and man becomes economic man, driven by an unremitting pecuniary passion that is variably at the highest level of intensity.

Although motivated by the passions which, by liberal assertion, oppose and, indeed, sabotage the workings of human reason, capitalist behavior will neatly clarify who the most rational people are. All that need be done is to look at their bank accounts, since it is these which announce the level of "success" attained within a system of "equal opportunity"--the opportunity to achieve the status of commodity man. Thus the greater capacity for reason born into a few must be developed into a rational ability that is tangibly fulfilled through the acquisition of personal wealth, and which stands as the signification of "merit" in a liberal order.

That people of merit should rule is itself only rational. In any event, the obligations of the state are few, the major ones being to guarantee contracts freely entered into in a price-competitive

market and to not permit government, which is man made, or “conventional,” to “intervene” into the sphere of economics which is “natural” and, therein, closer to the ultimate truth, morality, and reason of the natural laws that conclusively represent humanity’s best chance to mitigate an incessant and unending condition of material scarcity and political despotism. Then, having dirtied themselves for a time in the “public sector” of politics, members of the governing elite will presumably return to the cleansing principles of the “private sector” of economics, leaving to others of their monetary station the obligation to rule for an equally short duration.

While economic power, or monopoly which, according to liberalism, will be quickly transformed into the unchecked power of a tyranny, is very improbable in a free market because of entrepreneurial struggle, the passions of human beings inevitably render any degree of public power dangerous--and certainly not to be trusted in one place. Here, the laws of nature are instructive. A natural and automatic competition among entrepreneurs--as this is propelled by "consumer sovereignty" and the consequent vagaries of supply and demand--needs to be artificially replicated in the public domain. This is to be accomplished through a constitution which encourages a pluralistic stratum of competing elites which will protect “natural rights”--most critically, the rights to and, patently, of property--as these are translated by a minimal state into civil rights and civil liberties.

Of course, as Adam Smith would have it, in the unlikely event an industry proves to be unavoidably monopolistic it should be removed from the private realm of the market and placed within the public realm of government. Otherwise the tremendous leverage of a monopoly will destroy market after market and, ultimately, the entire system of price competition--and with it the efficiency that results from those innovations in productive techniques that the free market

introduces. That is, monopolies must be socialized, a point that long eludes the musings of the "classical" and, now, those "neoclassical" proponents of "market values" who selectively quote Smith in support of "capitalism."

That the liberal position argues for a translation of private wealth into a system of rule by contending commercial elites is plain. However, this is certainly not an activity that liberals admire. To be involved in politics is never portrayed as a positive expression of the inner self, or even as a disreputable vehicle through which to enhance the development of the more desirable qualities within the species. The human disposition is, and always will be, economic, and the only legitimate purpose of government is to clarify and protect the rights that attend this disposition. For liberalism, material and financial accumulation, and not the supposedly arcane idea of the polis, is what human existence is about. That the appropriate few ought to rule simply reflects the fact that government is an unfortunate necessity if the anarchy of a state of nature, and a consequent diminution of the enjoyment of rights, is not to prevail.

With the triumph of liberal ideology in the United States political conflict becomes a quest for personal wealth and, in a less-conscious manner, for the status, power, and privilege that wealth commands in a country wherein the acquisition of money is automatically admired. It is notable that the doctrine behind this ideology is riddled with questionable abstractions, although a dominant liberalism considers them to be only realistic and, finally, "common sense." But the differences between the "private" and the "public" domains, the "rights" of property, a "free" market, and a continued preoccupation with an unresolvable scarcity in the midst of a multiplying material abundance, are not common sense in reference to any serious analysis of human needs and aspirations. In point of fact, the liberal portrait of human motivation, while revolutionary in the

epoch of its initial rendering, becomes rather simplistic and, in an age of monumental material productivity, even primitive in its major claims about human nature. It remains, however, along with its sovereign abstractions, the reflexive view of American majorities, deeply infusing the policy content of their will. As always, the ideological values and attitudes that reverberate within the presiding consciousness of a political system cannot be avoided, regardless of who actually governs. What results in America are the effective realities of a liberal order masquerading as a democracy.

\*\*\*\*\*

Almost invariably, special claims to rule are rooted in the assumption that only certain people are endowed with a naturally superior capacity to comprehend a specific and anterior body of knowledge required for "right rule." Whether this talent must be developed or not, such an assumption in regard to the qualified one or few is the historical seedbed of political elitism. It is importantly distinct from the lesser contention that special kinds of education, training, or experience, or a stipulated combination of any of these, produces operative elites, leading to government by "experts": a variation of elite rule that is not elitist since it is not dependent on the conviction that only a particular person--or people--uniquely possesses an inborn talent for the making of public decisions.

The democratic position accepts neither of these justifications for rule by one or a few. Yet, in so doing, it denies far more than it affirms. Democracy does not transform a majority into a paragon of political intelligence. It simply promulgates the view that everyone must be thought of as equally qualified to govern if none can offer publicly verifiable evidence to support an assertion of political superiority. And, if all who govern do not agree, the logic of the matter leads to voting, everyone having reached an alleged age of civic ability being eligible to vote, each to be accorded an

equal weight in the making of public policy, which becomes the tangible outcome of the will of the greatest number. When a controversy is finally boiled down to two options, the consequence must be majority rule.

Or one can favor anarchy, in which an adherence to political equality eventuates in an order wherein each person governs himself and no one else; in which there can be no civic action without unanimity; and, if there is unanimity, no action is necessary because when all concur the decision is already made. Given the egalitarian premises of democracy, this is logically sustainable. However, democrats are not anarchists. Since the empirical reality is that people seldom agree, they are absolutely persuaded that government is necessary, and that this must be predicated upon rule by majorities if the principle of political equality is not to be violated. Thus, when Edmund Burke disparaged democracy as merely “counting by the head,” he was correct. But then Burke was an unabashed elitist, and elitism or, more mildly, elite rule is, of course, the traditional alternative to majorities.

Nevertheless, the liberal formulation represented, and continues to represent, a profound assault against the conservative systems that, until then, had typified Western history, and that still predominate throughout most of the globe. These are orders grounded in the assumption that the special knowledge necessary to govern for the good of all is fully possessed by an ultimate elite which, it must follow, should rule unfettered by the influence of lesser elites, to say nothing of anyone, or anything, else in this world. For the conservative, the only real issue is to identify the one or the few who are truly qualified. Once this is accomplished--invariably through a proclamation of “self-evidence”--it becomes ridiculous to interfere with “right rule” by ceding any authority to those who have either less knowledge, or no knowledge at all, about the true principles of politics.

If for liberals the rational faculties of even the best of people are flawed because of their interior passions, in the conservative portrayal of the proper elite they are not. Hence within the school of European conservatism, of which Burke is a founding member, trust is bestowed upon those few who are capable of acting on the basis of their superior capacity to "feel" the salient truths of the national history; American conservatives, such as Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall, contend that people who are members of the qualified elite can be trusted to exercise right reason; while liberals, like James Madison, trust no one to govern, including those who constitute the very elite which they assert ought to rule.

Yet, whatever their differences, liberals and conservatives find fundamental alliance in their essential elitism and, most crucially, in their abiding anxiety that masses of the "wrong" people may attain public effect. In the liberal view, this is most likely to occur when the many escape, or even partially escape, from a central preoccupation with material survival--an occurrence that can only weaken their loyalty to the distributions of power and authority that emanate from an economic order that has moved humanity past abject necessity and even toward a certain amount of material affluence. Beyond this, liberals fear, overtly or implicitly, that the "average" person might go quite mad if released from the anxieties of an insufficiency of wealth, a situation that is conclusively intolerable for an animal that is inherently economic. For conservatives, on the other hand, the thought that most people have the capacity to care about politics in the first place is absurd. Yet, one way or another, in both the liberal and conservative versions, it is human nature itself that mandates the permanent continuation of elite rule--and, for liberalism, financial struggle--if civilization is to be preserved.

Plainly, the conservative argument must stipulate uncommon exceptions to its own dire view about most human beings; thus discovering those whose unusual talents renders them fit to govern without restraints; and even liberals are frequently sympathetic to such an outlook. At least they would agree that throughout human history the multitudes have largely consented to elitist claims, and that this probably indicates that most people are intrinsically incapable of shouldering the burdens of public responsibility. And that American majorities, thoroughly conditioned to a prevailing liberal ideology, fundamentally buy this depiction of their own political acumen, may infer that they really are in charge in a country where a majority does not trust majorities to govern even while it has no real confidence in anyone else.

\*\*\*\*\*

However this may be, government by majorities does not, in itself, really catch the essence of the Jeffersonian formulation. To simply assert that a majority ought to rule is blatantly insufficient as a political doctrine. Like liberalism and the American brand of conservatism, the democratic position emanates from the assumption that truth, morality, and reason itself conclusively cohere within the laws of nature and that, accordingly, a comprehension of natural law, as discovered through the rational faculties of human beings, becomes the body of knowledge demanded for decent government. But at the core of democracy is the continued insistence that no special claim to rule, which must involve an ability that most do not have, either at all or in an equal amount, has ever been empirically demonstrated. Hence people ought to govern themselves simply because no one can be considered to be more rational and, thereby, qualified to govern others who are presumably less rational.

So much is fundamental. Still, there are further considerations which are inherent to the democratic perspective. There is always the possibility that a given majority, national or otherwise, can be perceived or, more likely, can perceive itself, as superior not only to an immediate minority, but to the greater majority of other human beings who happen to populate the earth. That is, a majority can be the object of an elitist or, at a minimum, an elite affirmation of superior political wisdom. And, the theme of American exceptionalism proposes exactly this. Here the “genius” does not reside in the one or the few. It is found instead in the practical “common sense” of American majorities--and it is exactly this contention which long justifies the “civilizing” role of the United States in the international arena through expansionist economic and military policies, along with its much-applauded commitment to serve as a model for the rest of humanity, a penchant that will find no shortage of company within the annals of the human experience.

Thus, despite repeated assurances about the rationality of “the American people,” it is reasonable to suspect that majorities and an aggressive nationalism of the second stage could coalesce in a manner that many democrats would be inclined to refer to as “undemocratic.” In this regard, the “culture-bearing” and “civilizing” ambitions of German majorities during the Nazi years offer an informative example. If this disturbs some who advocate “democracy,” it remains, nonetheless, an inescapable expression of the will of the majority. In the United States such a tendency has found its primary articulation, so far, when the country is going through one of the spasmodic red scares that punctuate its history, episodes replete with those celebrations of American exceptionalism which emanate from the Puritan foundations of the nation, and that infuse its proclamations of superiority. Plainly, there is nothing within the doctrine of democracy which guarantees that majorities will invariably adhere to the admonition of Jefferson to demonstrate “a decent respect to

the opinion of mankind."

What this must suggest is that there is more to democracy than the principles of popular sovereignty and political equality which finally find application through the mechanistic principle of majority rule. And, in fact, the democratic formulation does not laud government by majorities as much as it consistently represents a critique of the long history of elitist and elite claims. Certainly, it is true that the Jeffersonian contention was in concordance with the eighteenth-century notion of perfection, a position associated with certain French formulations which some term the "vulgar Enlightenment," and which projected an equal rational capacity into the equality of the fully actualized rational ability of each, whereby all the laws of nature and, therein, all of truth, morality, and reason, would be totally discovered, and everyone would act accordingly in a completely egalitarian and harmonious world wherein disagreements had disappeared. But it is also plain that this was rooted in the conviction that the better lights of the human species evolved historically, and that Jefferson comprehended the rational development of human beings as a permanent process of increasingly manifest emergence--the revolutionary component within his argument which continues to afford hope to many and that accounts for the power of its persistent appeal.

It is in this context that Jefferson introduces his proposal for a "natural aristocracy"--conceived of as those who have furthest translated an equal capacity for reason into a temporarily unequal rational ability and who, as a consequence, are currently most qualified to guide humanity along the road of rational progress--a notion of a leadership which, in the final analysis, will dissolve as all move closer to a greater-and more-equal level of rational attainment. While this process can probably never reach perfection, it will eventually result in a condition wherein all have reached an equal ability to govern. However, Jefferson could not really tolerate the institution of any ruling

elite, even if this elite was based on the “natural” ingredient of reason as opposed to the “artificial” criterion of wealth; even if this aristocracy complied with the ancient Greek notion of a few who rule for the good of all, in contrast to an oligarchy, wherein the few govern only for the good of themselves; and even if this elite was largely identified by its commitment to the ultimate eradication of any need for its own governing position. Thus, the natural aristocrat was to be elected by majorities which, by definition, were not composed of natural aristocrats--a strange view that is mandated by the very logic of a doctrine that must refute all special claims to political authority.

Importantly, for Jefferson, leadership of this kind becomes required only if jurisdictions surpass in size and complexity what he thought of as the “ward-republic.” When the prevailing relationships among citizens are no longer face to face; when the technology that drives economic arrangements is not simple and conducive to individual comprehension and use, but becomes opaque in substance and immense in scope, thereby placing the information necessary for public decisions, and for the determination of what “the issues” are, beyond the reach of most people; and when the actualities of labor move from the autonomy and financial self-sufficiency of small farming to a situation wherein the many are employed by a few and, accordingly, no longer politically independent, then all that is feasible is a fall-back position. This Jefferson refers to as “a republic of the second grade of purity,” a constitutional republic which incorporates “representation” at least partially determined by popular elections. Certainly, this is no longer self-government, in which each can be represented only by themselves, and it cannot be thought of as a democracy. It is, on the contrary, a Lockian order which to some extent involves majorities, although they can hardly be considered especially relevant to the actual exercise of political authority. And, for most people, such a system clearly does not permit an active engagement in the civic existence that is

indispensable to the democratic perspective, regardless of the fact that all are considered to be equal in their rational capacities.

Still, what remains significant is the insistence that human beings, including majorities of human beings, have not arrived, but are in the process of arriving, and probably always will be. The positive possibilities within people are not an achievement to be admired. They constitute a goal to be sought after--and the catalyst of this motion is immersion in the public world. In short, an "end" to history is unlikely, a proposal, not incidentally for Jefferson, which directly, and consciously, accords with the values and purposes of a scientific methodology.

It is also the basis of the further Jeffersonian advocacy of continuing majorities--the declaration that the will of a present majority cannot be bound by a decision of a past majority. Anything else would violate the controlling principles of democracy: popular sovereignty, political equality and, most overtly, majority rule as they apply to any immediate situation. However, the more crucial point of continuing majorities is an emphasis on human progress that corresponds to scientific theories of continual motion--as distinct from a utopia that can be totally realized. Not surprisingly, this is the Jefferson who wanted a revolution and then, more moderately, a constitutional convention, every nineteen years--even though it has been indisputably popular in times of American retrenchment to interpret him in a very different manner.

\*\*\*\*\*

Perhaps the most useful approach to understanding Jefferson is to confront the foundations of his vision of what democracy is really all about. These are actually found in the conviction of many of the classical Greeks that the good life depends on what they referred to as the "telos," a

quality which uniquely pertained to every object in the universe; that was held to precede the existence of any discrete entity; and which teleologically established the a priori purpose of such existence. While absolute fulfillment of this purpose was presumed to be unreachable, the good life was thought to be that which moved substantially toward a complete realization of its own telos.

When it came to human beings, the telos, for most of the Athenian Greeks, was typically divided into two general categories: the lower type of labor, which was associated with the many, and the higher type of the political, which applied strictly to a few. "Man is a political animal," pronounced Aristotle. But this included only those qualified by an essential connection to a telos that was in itself political: and it did not mean "is," it really meant "should" if those who were innately political were to achieve the good life. What was, therefore, required was total participation in either the greater life of labor or the greater life of the polis if a distortion of the individual and a resulting personal and societal misery were to be avoided. Herein is the real basis of the word "totalitarian," which is literally a theory of personality development which holds that people must totally lose themselves in a life greater than they are if they are to find themselves as integrated human beings. It is by no means a description of a state, for which "authoritarian" is usually the correct terminology.

In this manner, the Athenian outlook about who should rule justifies an arrangement wherein the labor of the many provides the economic wherewithall and--rather conveniently--the leisure necessary for the few, who must be exempt from toil so they can expend their energies as they ought to in their appropriate role as "citizens." It is not amazing that in ancient Athens most people were slaves, primarily the prisoners of various wars, while those who were "political" constituted the ruling regime. Often absurdly referred to as "Athenian democracy," this is a profoundly elitist order.

Whatever the disagreements with Plato about the viability of the stable Republic, within which the actualization of the telos of each has been literally reached, it is an order that is critically informed by the Platonic injunction that justice is found, and human fulfillment achieved, only when everyone performs their proper function.

These are ideas about human nature that lurk deeply within the ambience of the Jeffersonian contention. Yet there are differences, and these are fundamental. By the eighteenth century, the telos was no longer conceived of as being present before the fact of existence, but was apprehended as emerging simultaneously with, and as intrinsic within, each instance of existence. Hence, in reference to human beings, when people are born their telos is born with them, and, in this sense, when Jefferson talks about political equality, the arcane idea of the telos remains central to the conception. But Jefferson will not accept the elitism of the Athenian formulations or, for that matter, any other elitist assertion, on the by-now predictable grounds that no special claim to rule has ever been confirmed by evidence that can be publicly shared. Short of this, it must be assumed that the telos of everyone is equally political; that each is equally capable of being a citizen; and that full absorption into the ongoing life of the polis is equally necessary to the good life for all. Or, in his terms, people are equally political animals by nature, and any progressive improvement of the human personality depends on this disposition finding a tangible outlet through civic engagement.

It is also Jefferson's view that the material foundation for citizenship no longer requires slave labor. The growing seasons, an important manifestation of natural law, supply the leisure for the farmer to truly act as a citizen, while it is the financial independence of the small farmer which allows the political independence that is fundamental to any real conception of citizenship, and the essential reason why democracy has always been an agrarian argument. What results, for Jefferson, is the

ward-republic, which is not only small and technologically simple, but which is always described as a system of self-government by free-hold farmers.

Indeed, the democratic argument historically affirms a moral preference for an agricultural world, a persistent inclination that centrally informs its doctrinal tradition. It is with Marx that the effort to break with this agrarian emphasis emerges. Here is the attempt to conceptualize the feasibilities of self-government within an industrial--and, by extrapolation, a postindustrial and corporate epoch. In doing this, Marx accepts the Jeffersonian proposition that the telos of all is equal and political, and that full immersion in the civic life is crucial to the motion of any truly human development. In brief, the commune of Marx becomes the industrial analog of the ward-republic of Jefferson.

However, for Marx, the telos of every person is equal in another sense, a sense that introduces a radical conception of labor. People are infused with the telos of labor as much as with the telos of the political. Such labor, of course, is not what Marx portrays as "alienated labor." It is "free labor," which is identified as the outward and genuine expression of the inner person, a distinction now articulated by some as the difference between toil, or "labor," and work. What this attests to is that the desire for free labor, as well as for effective activity in the polis, are both paramount expressions of the individual reaching out to a larger world. And these are more than compatible. Indeed, they are perceived as inseparable, suggesting that there is a vast range of ways to act in a civic manner, and that to be directly active in government is not the only and, perhaps, not the most significant avenue to public effect. What this finally infers is that human behavior is always political because it invariably manifests a need for power and that power relationships are present as soon as more than one person is involved; that there is no evidence of people existing in a solitary

situation; and that any supposed gulf between the "public" and the "private" is not empirically sensible since the very idea of the private is a social invention that distorts the realities of the individuation of the human personality.

\*\*\*\*\*

To the liberal mentality which, soon after the early Puritans, comes to dominate American thinking, these are unreasonably abstract claims. Yet, as already noted, the liberal tradition also relies upon abstractions which might be considered somewhat unreasonable. Although a notion of rule by the demos, or by the many who are poor, can be found in classical Greek thought, both among the Ionians, some of whom favored it, and the Athenians, who overwhelmingly did not, the attempt to develop a coherent argument supporting democracy only emerges during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Western Europe. In fact, the appearance of democracy as an actual doctrine of politics slightly postdates the enormity of the liberal revolution which is the major political result of the "Age of Reason," and the doctrinal and ideological struggle between liberalism and democracy becomes a contradiction of contemporaries that now insistently intrudes upon the politics of Western systems. For three centuries the liberal perspective has substantially prevailed even while grudgingly conceding ground to the democratic Left.

Between these, the democratic view is more truly classical than that of liberalism, perceiving engagement with the greater world as a vocation that allows movement toward the realization of a telos that is individually unique and yet commonly human. In this regard, it fits with what an empirically oriented social inquiry has been finding for more than a century. With the addition of the notion of free labor as a material expression of the creativity of the inner person, the democratic approach becomes far more fruitful than that of liberalism in promoting a scientific inquiry into the

deeper motivations of the species.

Such "economic" considerations are vital for other reasons. The differences between liberals and democrats about elitism and equality and, therefore, about who should rule historically emanate from a disagreement about whether people are finally economic or power-seeking animals and, accordingly, whether they are "private" or "public" creatures. In the parlance of present-day policy disputes, this is often depicted as a debate about the essential purposes of the economic structure. However, the unstated issue of this debate is whether the incessantly avaricious nature of human beings insures that economic scarcity is forever, or whether there are further and more positive aspects of that nature which are barely tapped because the experience of the species has long been mired in a subsuming tale of material necessity--a tale that finally can be surmounted once a material affluence is possible.

About this, the democratic position is clear. A traditional willingness of the many to hand over public power and political authority to the few is not due to a natural immaturity of "the masses," but merely evidence that most people have some distance to go before they can deal with the demands of self-government. Still, any tendency in this direction depends on a steady resolution of the economic problem. And, in contrast to the liberal, the democrat is sure that this is a matter that can be resolved. As implied by the theory of diminishing marginal utility, even a relative removal from scarcity will typically encourage human beings to pursue their deeper ambitions: to seek public influence in myriad ways that, in the end, always involve power in the polis. This comports with the democratic view of freedom, a phenomenon which is synonymous with civic power and effect--as distinct from the liberal stress on rights and liberty which demarcates a sphere

wherein political authority may not extend--a sphere, within the paradigm of liberalism, that is categorically associated with the personality as a reflection of the "private" realm of economics. Thus, in contrast to the democratic advocacy of public action, the liberal urges public avoidance and an endless preoccupation with wealth accumulation.

Plainly, the arguments for polis and free labor, which are at the core of the democratic position, speak to human needs that more overtly ramify when a certain level of financial security can begin to be generally assumed. These signify the release of those energies which define what Marx conceptualizes as "species man" or, rooted in scientific behavior, what Erich Fromm visualizes as people "grasping the world productively." Such contentions are often referred to as "positive liberty" and "positive freedom," as differentiated from "negative liberty" and "negative freedom," a formulation wherein liberty—or rights—and freedom are actually identical. But the easier and more patent distinction is between liberty and freedom. And freedom must translate into power although, to adopt the terminology of Fromm, not as "power over" but as "the power to be." Here freedom corresponds to the democratic proposal, becoming a more advanced human inclination that yields a positive influence on the self through conscious engagement in the public texture of existence.

\*\*\*\*\*

If, as John C. Calhoun correctly insists, force and coercion represent the breakdown of politics, the democratic contention is for the political in its fundamental sense of civic persuasion. Or, as Hannah Arendt puts it, power is always a matter of agreement by sufficient numbers of people--in fact, of consent, and the employment of force or coercion invariably reveals that agreement of this kind is absent. There is, in this perception, a rightness to power that must involve the classical notion of the polis and the more recent conception of free labor. On the surface, this

is not a theory about who possesses power, and why, and how it is exercised. It is a doctrinal posture about who should have power, and why, and for what purposes it ought to be employed.

All doctrines are grounded in a priori presuppositions and assumptions about the nature of the universe, society, or man--or any combination of these. But doctrines can also flow from a search for reality, or for theories, which themselves are grounded in presuppositions and assumptions about the nature of evidence, as well as upon the data that may support these theories.

Thus the democratic argument can emerge from a theoretical foundation, a point that is well illustrated by Walter Goldschmidt, who portrays the more profound aspirations of people as "a need for positive affect," a phenomenon that the empirical evidence suggests is a universal motivation found within all cultures and among all the human beings who compose them. Such is a need that finally seeks public power to a much fuller extent than the species has yet achieved--along with an increasingly egalitarian distribution of this power, because the necessity of protecting a position of "power over" drains any instance of "the power to be" of its positive content.

Yet an empirically discernable momentum toward a greater equality of civic power takes place only when the uniquely human activities that lead to scientific discovery open the door to dramatic improvements in the level of technological accomplishment. When this occurs, the established constellation of status, privilege, and influence that delineates a system gradually comes to be questioned, and ultimately unsettled. In this manner do the contradictions within the institutions of human existence find historical expression. The liberal revolution emanated from the dialectical tensions within the material seedbed of conservative governments in Western Europe. For the same reason, it now intrudes upon many other parts of the globe at the same time that an incipient democratic ethos ramifies from the contradictions within economic basis of the liberal order

itself--a confusing combination wherein a more egalitarian revolution is riding the back of an earlier and still-expanding liberal revolution.

Such transitions of consciousness and ideology always germinate rather glacially, even while their appearance as a new constituent of societal reality is invariably greeted as an "abrupt" and unwelcome dislocation of entrenched and respected tradition. Nevertheless, in the Western world, more people are "suddenly" uncertain whether the laws of nature actually dictate a "right" to profit from the labor of others, or whether rights attach to property at all, or if the qualification to rule should properly accrue from a cultural respect for personal pecuniary acquisition. For increasing numbers of its inhabitants a perennial quest for ever-more lucre is thought to be somewhat primitive, if not infantile behavior--an artifact of a long history of material scarcity that is in the process of dissolution. Still, while those who adhere to a more progressive liberalism are not resistant to moderate steps that encourage a greater equality of monetary condition or result, realizing, as they do, that a more equitable distribution of the wealth amplifies the totality of effective economic demand, they also stand in ardent opposition to any serious attempt to transform the order by redistributing the financial rationale for the present configuration of public influence and governmental policy. That a shift of this magnitude would contain a central challenge to the liberal arrangements of power, authority, and privilege is clear. Indeed, it certainly so appears to those who are currently in charge, and who often find themselves confronted by egalitarian claims they fundamentally abhor--and usually fail to comprehend. In response, many liberals adopt a more conservative stance, some even gravitating toward the oppression of a police state as the unfortunate price of "stability."

\*\*\*\*\*

It is the conjecture of Hegel that mankind steadily moves from a condition wherein one is free, to a condition wherein a few are free, and then further to where the many are free and, finally, to a condition wherein all are free. That is, because freedom is inseparable from public effect, civic power gradually becomes more equally distributed. The influence of this on Marx is evident although, as a “Young Hegelian,” he “stands Hegel on his feet” by insisting that such a tendency is not rooted in ideas but, on the contrary, that ideas are rooted in the abiding material realities of the human experience. Thus moving away from a great-man theory of history toward what will become known as social history—an early rendition of quantum forecasting which both Hegel and Marx apply to the transitions of social systems--they each contend that until all are free none are truly free, because the freedom of those who rule is constricted and distorted by the necessity of employing power over to maintain any semblance of control. Actual freedom, on the other hand, mandates that the power to be is held by all in an equal manner--the only arrangement that allows people to begin to more completely develop their inherently positive qualities.

What is really being expounded here is a democratic fusion of civic power with the feasibilities of the species becoming more fully human. From this perspective, once financial wherewithall can be reasonably assumed, a salient need for involvement in the polis and, thereby, for freedom will come to be more overtly articulated. This is a matter which is blatantly “public.” Still, the marketing genius of a prevailing liberalism continues, so far, to successfully merchandize the “private” nature of “capitalist” man through the assurance that material scarcity can never be eliminated because to be incessantly “economic” is the major rational activity of the authentic individual.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hence, while majority rule is the governing mechanism of democracy, this does not speak to the denser and more human issues that the democratic argument must confront. Thoughtful, democrats have never been as enamored with the intrinsic value of majority rule so much as with its function as a safeguard against social-class or elite domination. This is a negative posture which, because it is centrally focused on undermining all special claims to authority, usually demonstrates little regard for the dilemmas of an actual government by majorities. It is an outlook that simply fears the “wrong” people less than the “right” people, especially when the right people cannot publicly confirm their unique understanding of a special body of knowledge which allegedly justifies the civic superiority of those who possess it, either in an exclusive manner or, at a minimum, to a greater degree than the average run of human beings.

Yet the argument for majority rule also projects or, at least, implies the arrival of a technological and economic situation wherein a pervading concern with material survival begins to give way to a certain amount of assumable affluence. It is this that releases a more universal need for power that is both civic and personal, a need which infers that “individual” behavior insistently seeks effect beyond itself, and that “private” actions are always suffused with a “public” content.

This is a formulation of reality which concords with scientific understandings of human development and of the difficulties that attend the further actualization of the species. If what it postulates about these matters is vague, this is because the democratic argument does not indulge in the fixed depictions of a utopian vision, although it does pivotally focus on human motivations that, with rare but notable exceptions, are yet to achieve even partial and observable actualization. In any event, it might be wondered if the static consistency of a utopian world is truly a desirable situation. The findings of modern science about the connections between transformative struggle and human

development would strongly indicate otherwise.

However this may be, democracy is always predicated upon a notion of continual process: a process, articulated through the idea of continuing majorities, that presumably never stops since the clash of ingrained habit with unrealized possibility endlessly induces tensions among people--as well as within them. But, unlike biological evolution, this does not eventuate in a random pattern because, within the democratic view, species development reaches ever-more profound levels of human "imagination, sensibility, and intellect." In this, it is classically teleological, striving to fulfill those propensities of the psyche that are integral to human nature yet have been historically perceived as exceeding any chance of actual attainment, even as it attempts to do so on the basis of history itself.

Accordingly, once people are released from the prison of material necessity, their ambitions will transcend the more well-known theories of Marx and creep toward those of Freud--although hints of Freud are clearly to be found in the work of Marx, most systematically in his earlier writings. Human beings, will thus move, in the aggregate, from a preoccupation with eating to a concern with identity: and to a yearning to express that identity through that exercise of civic power upon which freedom depends. This is what Marx portrayed as the emergence of man qua man from the cocoon of animal man; a search for the interior telos of each, distributed by nature in an equal manner to all; and for an escape from the elitism, deprivation, exploitation, and contortion of being that infuses class struggle and epitomizes "the muck of ages."

Aware of it or not, both liberals and conservatives apprehend this prospect with dread. But for the democrat, what will evolve is the enhancement of a world founded on the essential justice of

an equality of treatment and, preferably, of condition or result--despite the fact that this is not the real basis of the democratic position since all can be treated equally in a manner that encourages the more retrograde motivations of the species. Still, the democrat is convinced that an expanded equality of public power and, consequently, a greater equality of freedom--as distinct from a liberal commitment to the defensive abstractions of liberty and rights--will release the more positive qualities within humanity. Herein resides the prime value of democracy--those valences of the action of freedom that compose the conclusive purpose of the democratic idea.

It follows that progress through polis and labor, and not majority rule, is what democracy is ultimately about. Nonetheless, most who support "democracy" continue to fix on majority rule, along with the details of its mechanisms and procedures, while avoiding the transformative ideological issues of values and attitudes within a material history that elevate the democratic claim into a meaningful contribution to political philosophy. Yet the majoritarian position remains vital because of the more profound concerns to which it leads. "Everybody is cleverer than anybody" remarked George Clemenceau. There is much truth to this. However, majorities never represent absolute agreement because they invariably incorporate a range of perceptions which, when publicly expressed, traditionally encourage an acceptance of the kind of evidence that correlates with scientific plausibility, and it is precisely such variation that is the key to evolutionary success--of human societies as well as of the species itself. Accordingly, while a majority is not "everybody," the chances of adaptive behavior are more likely to ramify from the many than from one or a few--an actuality that again suggests that majority rule is not the goal of democracy, but is more profoundly instrumental to the values of empiricism and reason.

And, in fact, this is the way history works. When Marx contended that democracy is the

essential truth of all ruling regimes he was not referring to orders wherein the authority of majorities literally governed. But, his sloppy use of language notwithstanding, the real point of his comment persists because the conception of popular sovereignty he is actually addressing is more than the presiding normative principle of many political doctrines, of which democracy is just one. It is also empirically crucial, because the consent of a critical mass of a population, whether active or tacit is the stabilizing force of any viable political system.

\*\*\*\*\*

The primary purpose of the liberal formulations about power and authority, as these are reflected in capitalism and constitutional government, is to frustrate the probable tyranny of the one or the few and, most vividly, that of majorities. Still, regardless of this intention, adherence to majority rule in the United States has become significant--or, as C.B. Macpherson puts it, "democracy" gradually arrives as an overlay on what is, at bottom, a liberal country. However, as Jefferson's preference for an agrarian configuration of ward-republics makes clear, jurisdictions of gigantic size and huge populations erase any real chance for self-government by rational majorities that can apply their reason to information to which they have full and equal access. Within a nation state that is also intractably exemplified by the magnitude and obscure interactions of advanced technology, as well as by the sheer volume and rapidity of civic decisions these engender, it is likely that most people, however rational they may be, will have little opportunity to comprehend the forces and perceived interests that besiege and infuse the political order--except, that is, through those media which are integral extensions of that order.

Thus, the centralizing imperatives of a highly sophisticated technology in the United States assure that people cannot be financially independent, even as "capitalist" entrepreneurs, because

they owe their monetary existence to a Byzantine maze of corporatized and bureaucratic institutions which nullify any semblance of a Jeffersonian arrangement of politically independent citizens. This is a condition made more extreme as the same tendencies are increasingly molded into a de facto transnational system. The consequent impulse for a consolidation of authority is immense and, as has been frequently observed, for the preponderance of its "citizens" American politics becomes hardly more than the greatest spectator sport in the country--at least in spasmodic spurts.

All of this works to place public influence beyond the reach of majorities. And, within these circumstances, the democratic proposal cannot reasonably rest on majority rule and the resulting actualities of people governing themselves. Indeed, to the extent that its proponents avoid its deeper and more human purposes, democracy has no relevance to the present texture of American politics. At best, the democrat must consciously face a confusing constellation of elite and social-class authority that is inordinately difficult to identify--to a point wherein it is quite conceivable that those who supposedly govern the order do not fully comprehend it, precisely while they avidly enlist "the people" in support of "democracy." Hence they attempt to create mass consent through the intentional and unintentional construction of reality by those dominant media that are appendages of the very technological suzerainty that renders an actual democracy impossible. Given the power of modern techniques of communication, if this sounds a bit like fascism, let the chips fall where they may.

What Jefferson would think about this is rather transparent because he always accepted the distinction between a majority and a mob, which was classically categorized as a majority out of touch with the controlling events of its own time and, for this reason, absolutely not qualified to rule. To some extent, Jefferson was sure that the paramount localism of the ward-republic--or even of

a slightly broader localism--would not allow a mob to emerge, while he was persuaded that the probabilities of exactly this greatly multiplied with commercial and industrial expansion and the accompanying gratification of the Constitution. Still, to undo contemporary economics by "returning" to a "communitarian" analog of ward-republics, or to a liberal capitalism, is to undo the impressive material wealth that flows from the productive planning that corporate concentration allows--a concentration that results not so much from big-business conspiracies, but from the technical requirements of modern production. To advocate a retreat from the affluence that this yields is to oppose that liberation of those human proclivities which informs the entirety of the democratic position--a paradox that democrats in a postindustrial age must finally confront.

Many who insist that democracy is presently feasible have been driven to accept competitive elections as a substitute for self-government--thus rejecting the democratic proposition that a person can represent only himself, and no one else. Simply put, this is as near to a majoritarian system as they can get. But even here they often perceive majorities to be acting in "undemocratic" ways, a logical conundrum they would usually rather ignore. Some try to resolve the dilemma by adopting the liberal formula of counterposing "rights" against what they often see as the tyrannical tendencies of the many, thereby giving up on even their own corrupted rendition of "democracy." And all the while there is the risk that if people are told often enough that they actually rule, they might come to believe it, and to find themselves a bit irritated when they find out they do not.

\*\*\*\*\*

Nevertheless, that majorities will typically express the ongoing perceptions, values, and attitudes of the moment has been noted by those who apprehend democracy as a very stable, if not

a "conservative" order. At the very least, majorities will generally manifest a habitual acceptance of the traditional foundations of the economic system, and of the level of consciousness these dictate.

Yet they will do so with much greater variation than will the equally conditioned responses of the one or a few. Since a majority of people seldom agree about discrete policy issues, even when they vote the same way, this must encourage a pluralistic ethos that is implicitly egalitarian, and that, in the United States, puts pressure on the financial elitism of a prevailing liberalism. In this manner the commitment to "American democracy" may actually whittle away at the ideology behind which a dominant corporate reality hides.

As Engels points out, a sufficient series of quantitative changes can ultimately bring about a qualitative change, a phenomenon currently referred to as the process of "punctuated equilibria," suggesting that an institutionalized pluralism, which is long embedded within the liberal order of competing commercial elites, can finally surpass the capitalistic restraints of its own history. It follows that, if the technological imperatives do not permit majorities to literally govern, the mechanism of majority rule is still necessary to any progressive argument, not with any expectation of self-government, but as instrumental to public power that is distributed in a more egalitarian manner and that is conducive to a social order that encourages that which is productively human. In this regard, majority rule becomes analogous to the procedures associated with the tradition of due process of law, the purpose of which is not the procedures as much as their utility in the search for justice in particular cases. However, here the attempt is to expand and support what Fromm portrays as the life-furthering as opposed to the life-thwarting predilections within the human psyche, an effort which corresponds with an emphasis on the power to be as distinguished from power over. Accordingly, while the democratic principle of majority rule can no longer constitute

an end in itself, it continues to be crucial to the democratic commitment to the development of the species. And, in a postindustrial epoch, it is specifically vital to the emergence of a more egalitarian pluralism that ultimately addresses not only the issue of a greater equality of condition or results, but that also moves toward an equality of civic effect.

Of course, it could be propounded that while a need for public influence may pertain to certain people, it has no application to most. Thus, when Arendt advocates “action” in the public space as that which makes the inevitable not happen--the citizen in the polis as a critical manifestation of free will in historical experience--this is depicted as an opportunity for true civic behavior that should be open to all but, in Arendt’s view, which will appeal to relatively few. These are the “*vitea activa*,” people who, by nature, are of a higher type than those who compose the multitudes. Among the many, some may have the abilities of “*homo faber*”--those who possess the imagination and skill to craft the artifacts of the world. However, in terms of sheer probabilities, people are most likely to be “*animal laborans*,” whose only capacity is to endlessly produce for immediate material consumption. Here is an important twist on the traditional liberal formulation of equal opportunity as a permanent search for exchange value, which is as far as the capitalist commitments of liberalism will allow it to reach. The operative goal for Arendt is not pecuniary gain through a presumed contribution to the totality of economic wealth. It is, rather, the use value of action in the polis, the functional reality of the democratic idea although, in this instance, such opportunity has application only to a few.

While agreeing with the abiding liberal acclaim for rule by competing elites, the Platonic roots of Arendt’s position are plain. Unlike those who are more solidly within the liberal tradition, Arendt does not associate those who should govern, the *vitea activa*, with personal financial accumulation.

Moreover, she stipulates the existence of a very few, the “*vitea contemplativa*,” whose talents exceed even the polis because they are capable of the rarified joys of philosophy, a proposition that Plato would vociferously applaud. It is in this fashion that the argument for equal opportunity resonates throughout the conjectures of Arendt, even while acclaiming a classical preference for human thought and public behavior that really has no place within the liberal pantheon of monetary profit and private material aggrandizement.

In this, Arendt comes close to the democratic perspective. Nonetheless, she is not democratic and patently not sympathetic to those ancient themes that comprise the foundation of the egalitarian position. She is, indisputably, an elitist without the focus on family and, accordingly, social-class position which typically accompanies an elitist claim--and she combines this elitism with a liberal notion of rights that justifies certain restraints on how far the authority of even the “*vitea activa*” should be allowed to extend. But here the emphasis is less on property rights than on those that protect personal expression and, in contrast to liberal perceptions, Arendt does not consider the acquisition of money to be a form of personal expression. What results is an elitist outlook that is undeniably classical yet is influenced by the subsequent history of a liberal constitutionalism--an approach that derives from a basis that is plainly Athenian and that refutes the more-egalitarian Ionian contentions that centrally inform what becomes the democratic formulation.

Among contemporary writers, the essence of the democratic argument is better articulated by Sheldon Wolin. Writing from what is easily discerned to be a Jeffersonian point of view, Wolin portrays the predominant struggle of modern America as one between an equality of citizenship in “the political,” in a classical and democratic sense, and “politics,” a phenomenon which merely reflects an endless series of disputes about who has what claim on the available wealth within a

system wherein a pecuniary inequality finds its exchange value in an inequality of status and power. Such a system, of course, is not supportive of “the power to be.” In fact, it is inseparable from “power over.” Hence the contemporary American order simply represents a particular version of what Lincoln Steffens conceived of as the real intent of all politics--a competition for privilege.

Both Arendt and Wolin would undoubtedly agree that the battle for privilege has epitomized human history, and that this has been played out in terms of material accumulation. They would also concur that people are capable of far more than this—some for Arendt, everyone for Wolin--through a transformation in the definition of human needs and, consequently, of consciousness and ideology: a transformation that depends on the disappearance of economic scarcity, and which will propel human energies into an engagement with larger and more civic purposes. Still, even as applied to the few, such a conviction is tenaciously resisted by the bedrock of liberal ideology; a habit of mind which is sure that the character of the species is not changeable, but is doggedly fixed in its overweening ambition for lucre; that no real solutions are to be found within the public realm, and that the classical view of the political as a positive force that for species emergence is nothing other than naïve nonsense. Hence, separate of an amplification of material productivity, there can be no true improvement in the human condition because of a nature that prevents any change in what is generically an economic personality. By so arguing, liberalism denies progress itself, at least in a human sense--a contention which, while essentially agreeable to Arendt, finally exceeds even her own favorable inclinations toward the static composition of human history. What remains for liberals is the market, and a desire for ever-greater rates of profit becomes the most sublime motivation of man--a cramped and frozen conception of the possibilities of the species and of what it might mean to be civilized.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once incredibly revolutionary in releasing a substantial portion of humanity from the bondage of necessity, a liberal capitalism accordingly stalls at the boundaries of its own victory. It can go no further because it cannot visualize anywhere further to go. This is "the end of ideology" or, more currently, "the end of history," the proclamation of all successful movements that have exhausted the logic of their own controlling formulations. In thrall to its declared rendition of human limits, all that the most "left" of liberals can support is a moderate redistribution of a steadily aggrandizing pile of material wealth.

Still, the capitalist element within the liberal world view becomes more notably inadequate with even a partial realization of economic abundance. The mitigation of scarcity which, for liberalism is unreachable because of the intrinsically avaricious nature of man is, for the democrat, not only attainable, it is the starting point of human history: a process that commences well before the problem of scarcity is literally solved. Surely, the contradictions with which people are infused will continue, but they will attain more sophisticated and complex manifestations as the quest for those traits that are unique to the species proceeds. Or, as Sidney Hook so cogently puts it in regard to Marx's portrayal of human development, following the end of social-class systems, "man moves from the plane of the pitiful to the plane of the tragic." For the democrat, this is the political evolution of the species, a journey from the stultifying constrictions of economic man to the more subtle and profound contradictions of political man. Concerns about affirmation, gratification, and meaning magnify precisely as technological advance allows them to materialize in a deeper and more discernable manner within populations.

In the United States this is clearly revealed in the development of social policy during much of the twentieth century. To base a claim on a "right" is the coin of the realm in the politics of a liberal nation and, over the years, the conception of "right" has expanded into many new areas of American existence, influencing real incomes in a manner which would have been branded as "un-American" not too long ago. Certainly, in a fundamental sense this supports the stabilizing necessities of the order through the buying off of large-scale discontent in the face of a rapidly increasing material abundance. But these policies have also been promoted by a "Left" which self-consciously identifies with what it perceives to be the promise of Jeffersonian democracy. Crucially, however, an infusing liberal ideology prevents those who compose this movement from confronting Jefferson's view of the essential relationship between economic structure and the actualities of public power. Many social policies do equalize civic effect to a minor degree. Nevertheless, in a country steeped in a world view that is, at bottom, economic, they fail to address the systemic foundations of political authority, as well as the connections of such authority to the fulfillment of those more advanced human needs that are essentially civilizing in their inherent tendencies.

It is in this context that the classical idea of the polis, or what Wolin refers to as "the political," becomes systemically essential. The need for public effect through the power to be, with all its dialectical difficulties and nuances, begins to rapidly appeal to the changing consciousness and subsequent ideology of more and more people in the United States who, regardless of their ingrained love of commerce, and a corollary inability to identify the source of their discontent, evince a growing cynicism about the amalgamation of economic power that logically results from the liberal version of "success"--and which infuses the material substance of established authority. Despite an incessant barrage of congratulations about the "exceptionalism" of the nation, what Marx portrays

as "free" or unalienated labor slowly comes to be sought after as a concrete expression of the inner person and as a vital ingredient of self-actualization, intensifying the emancipation, as well as the variations and paradoxes of the national existence.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is plain that the democratic impulse is rooted in much more than the mechanism of majoritarian procedures. And, its instrumental importance notwithstanding, the informing purpose of self-government does not truly revolve around the fact of governing--even when it is done by majorities. It is also more than a call for the elimination of elite control through an insistence that all special claims to that knowledge purportedly required for right rule must be subject to the publicly verifiable or falsifiable test of empirical evidence--a demand that is of greater historical significance than the argument for majority rule itself. Moreover, democracy cannot be grounded in the tangential proposal that, if differences in rational capacity actually exist, the chances of reasonable action by an entire population are still statistically better than if civic decisions are left to one or a few--a stipulation, as applied to the few, that frontally assaults the liberal assurance that equal opportunity is a means of identifying those most qualified to govern. Finally, democracy is not about competitive-party elections intertwined with a market ideology that yields an elitist polyarchy of finance with which democracy is now substantially confused, and wherein the substitution of "representative government" for the actualities of self-government is ignored.

Among the many facets of the democratic stance, none ever advocates an equality of condition or result, unless that is what the majority commands. What democracy seeks is an equality of public power, finding the clue to this in the authority of majorities. Its advocates usually dismiss all notions of pluralism as the nonmajoritarian clashes and alliances of perceived interests and their

attendent pressure groups. However, this traditional posture ignores the point that in systems of extensive geographic size, populated by tremendous numbers of people who typically cannot associate particular officials with specific policies or, indeed, such policies with their own existence, and complicated by the intricate interactions of postindustrial production, any sensible progressive claim has little to do with the inherent localism of majorities.

As did Jefferson, the contemporary democrat needs to establish a fall-back position. And this must encourage a more expanded distribution of public influence in a manner which enhances those tendencies toward a more egalitarian diversity of civic power that are contained within the interior tensions of science and technology as a historical force--a force which has largely neutralized the significance of local jurisdictions. This necessitates an escape from the ideological hegemony of a liberalism rooted in a capitalistic fixation on a perennial scarcity, and on the values of commerce and profit in the guise of technology. In short, those who would promote democracy have to discover a new material foundation, and this can only be found in the pluralistic panorama of a scientific methodology which has become crucial to modern production--and in the systemic consequences for consciousness and ideology which this imposes on a postindustrial era. To be sure, this does not serve the principle of majority rule. Yet it does comply with a more profound concern of the democratic perspective--that to not be actively engaged in the life of the political is not to be fully human.

At the core of the democratic contention resides the idea of freedom as action in the polis, and all the stipulations about the needs and aspirations of people that ramify from this essential conception. As such, it is about the struggle of the species to become more civilized through its expression in free labor and in the associated realities of public power that emerge from an

increasingly egalitarian pluralism. In the final analysis, democracy finds its substance within the historical contradictions of this struggle, and within the conclusive texture of progress as this is actualized through the political, a phenomenon that invariably reflects the characteristic content of the human condition at any point in its long crawl toward the individuation of a vast array of shared propensities and unique personalities.