

HUMANISM AND THE TRADITION OF DISSENT

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James Madison described custom as "second nature." making his observation in the context of expressing skepticism of the social engineering being attempted by the reformer, Robert Owen. Such dreamers presumed to be "first nature." Madison's lack of illusion about the easy malleability of human character in a living society has gained impressive justification in the failure of every attempt since his time to redesign "the new man" of revolutionary vision. If it is difficult for psychotherapy to alter the deeply ingrained character traits of a maturing individual, it can hardly be simpler to command the radical transformation in mass of human traits formed over time within a deeply rooted and dynamic historical community.

This fact was understood at least as early as the tradition that denied to Moses and his generation admission into the promised land. Indeed, the Biblical writers - or rather the immemorial storytellers from whom they derived their lore - were wildly romantic to suppose that a mere forty years of desert wandering - the passing of but a single generation - would suffice to effect the transformation that their legend sought to explain. Forty generations, rather than forty summers, might be a more insightful rendering of the tale. At least when we come nearer to our own time we can say with considerable confidence that the cluster of cultural traits that produced and still supports the Bill of Rights and the tradition of liberty of conscience as we know it has involved some forty generations in the English speaking world - even without considering any of that culture's near relatives and antecedents in Western civilization. This resilient and stubborn tradition - living at first a furtive, underground existence - had made considerable headway as early as Chaucer's time. Traits of character embodying independence of mind and resistance toward state-supported ideology and religion became endemic in the English population. Parallel developments can be seen in many other nations, past and present, that have fallen under the control of an alien elite, or of a class or party viewed as subservient to a foreign power. As we shall attempt to show, this was the situation of English popular culture and religion during the centuries of control by a French speaking court aristocracy and their church hierarchy.

But while other cultures have undergone similar histories of conquest and subservience, the special circumstances of the English experience were unusually favorable for the emergence and survival of cultural traits and of institutional practices upon which the ideology of human rights and freedom of conscience has since been so dependent. Antedating the Anglican reformation by centuries, this grassroots movement immediately overflowed the boundaries of the new Protestant establishment and to a

considerable degree superceded it, not only in Great Britain but especially in the overseas colonies where the restraints of the motherland were weakened or absent. Thus dissent became a deeply engrained set of attitudes and mental habits, a veritable "second nature" to a large and expanding populace that eventually found its opportunity in the circumstances accompanying and following the American Revolution. The contemporary humanist movement is heir to that temperament and tradition, although this side of humanism's descent has been largely conceded to separatist Protestantism.

Madison's age was more sanguine than our own in thinking it possible to define the boundary between "nature," presumably received in a state of immutable purity from the hand of the Creator, and the "second nature" of a corrupted and alterable - albeit highly resistant - custom. But to determine that boundary, even if it should exist (which is doubtful), would be a digression that it is not essential to the theme of this paper. As "second nature," custom imposes its own "natural" law. To persist for generations, patterns of living and of perceiving the world must be at least sufficiently consonant with a people's deepest drives and responses to commend themselves to their unconscious choices and defenses. The enduring values we hold spring from social and historical sources that claim a certain and largely unconscious ultimacy over us. "Nature" and "second nature" are a single process of concrete historical development in the life of a people or a civilization. This is not to say there are no choices. But the character of the choice-maker brings with it assumptions, perceptions, and preferences. Intelligence, while morally and intellectually autonomous, is hardly unconditioned, and certainly far from free of the unconscious influences of social and personal history that play upon it.

None of these psychic forces bearing upon the life of the mind and shaping the purposes and aspirations of each of us should lead us to conclude that we are mere victims of history or impotent agents acting out a mean and impoverished moral and affective life. On the contrary, we owe our capacity for freedom, our dignity, and our feeling of personal significance - in short, all that provides a sense of moral self-worth and transcendence - to unconscious assimilation of a personal "place" in on-going human community with a concrete history, heritage, and "destiny." The individual removed from this moral and spiritual envelope, projected by a social history and group memory, has no basis for feelings of personal worth and/or enduring value in time, a profound psychological need that Ashley Montagu has called "social immortality." We can surrender belief in a personal life beyond the grave, Montagu has argued, but we cannot remain whole and healthy without at least the implicit assurance that we live vicariously in the spirit of a surviving community.

Often this prompting is expressed in the desire of people to have children and grandchildren, assuring them of "biological immortality." And, no doubt, for millions of human beings down through the ages this form of personal self-transcendence has been the most immediate and secure expression of the desire to project the self beyond the boundaries of individual existence. For many, this must have seemed the only means to

survive beyond their term, to renew their life in their descendants. Yet we must ask whether this effort to cheat death through biological replication has ever been sufficient, or even primary. Has it not rather served as the fleshly conveyance of a less tangible moral and social legacy? Painter and poet forfeit family and renounce all prospect of engendering living descendants in an effort to wrest a more spiritualized form of immortality from their art. Soldiers advance upon almost certain death rather than violate the bond that closely joins them to comrades and country. Even average, unheroic people called upon to make no extraordinary sacrifices, expend their lives at tedious and distasteful tasks, not because they would actually perish or suffer ostracism by forsaking them, but because their sense of self-esteem - their internalized imperative of what family and public expect of them - drives them on. We all live to "find our place" or "make our mark" as members of a surviving community. Even our most individualized and privatized of cultures has not lessened this imperative. One can argue, on the contrary, that it has increased its intensity by throwing the whole force of psychic vulnerability upon each isolated self. In this atmosphere, competitiveness is less a license for free expression than a social demand to validate one's being, each against all. In its effect on the human psyche a highly privatized culture acts as the secularized successor of the old Pauline-Augustinian doctrine of the necessity of individual salvation, but without the compensation of eventual heavenly community among the elect. Human solidarity is extinguished irrevocably. We should not be surprised that recrudescence of the most self-centered fundamentalism accompanies the social solipsism of this present period. A state of moral privatism seals hermetically the windows of the human spirit, granting a fading hope of psychic security that soon delivers its devotees to the most available form of absolutism, whether it be that of Caesar or of God.

The strains on our social institutions at the present time, the rupture of psychological bonds that have heretofore linked person to person, and each succeeding generation to both a human past and a future, are symptoms of a culture striving for the impossible: the attempt to design a "society" of encapsulated, self-contained members. For reasons already expressed, such "persons" cannot exist, could find no significance in their lives if they did exist, and could not associate themselves into a "society" that defined "relationships" in such nugatory, narcissistic terms. The doctrine of self-fulfillment now widely preached, and which many are attempting to put into practice with such individually and socially catastrophic results, is a recipe for producing whole generations of "liberated" beings without social identities or communities for such identities. Egotism and self-depreciation, epidemic drug abuse, emotional illness, and juvenile suicide are the inevitable results of a view of life that severs the individual from the social and intergenerational arteries of his or her nurture and well-being.

The extreme example of this contemporary type is perhaps most starkly illuminated by reports of those generally affluent young adults who profess to feel no sense of obligation to their parents. They owe their parents nothing, not even gratitude. Their logic is impeccable, if we grant the

assumption of absolute moral self-containment from which they operate: their parents chose to have children; they as the children had no part in that decision. Therefore, all obligation flows from the parent; none, not even gratefulness, accrues to the child. The attitude reveals the impotence of a "myself only" solipsism that has amputated itself from the human past - and thereby from any claim upon the future, including the claim to belong to that future. Prospect assumes retrospect. An a-historical age aborts its future, no less than its past. History that *lives* is the spine of the present; it is contemporaneity underneath the skin. We live *for* the future *by* grace of the past. All that we can do for the past is to receive its gift gratefully - the only way the past can be assimilated. Without this reciprocity of historical fidelity between the human future and past the channels of transmission are clogged, and each moment of life dies a solitary death, isolated and ungrieved.

It was a wise scribe who first parsed the fifth commandment so as to link possession of the future with moral commitment to debts due the past: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." (We note that this is the only law of the decalogue that comes with a limited warranty.) To honor the history that nurtured us is to meet a condition for coming into possession of our destiny. We thereby close the circuit through which the life forces flow. To transmit individuality - which means transmitting the cluster of cultural values and behaviors that reproduce individuality - requires a long social experience of individualized interactions, a fact that a consistent ethic of privatism denies and, if long continued, must finally destroy.

Here then is the apparent paradox of individual freedom and the maintenance of self-reliant character in an ongoing humanistic society: those cultural traits and values that make it for the greatest degree of individuation are at the same time the most completely and profoundly interpersonal and intergenerational in origin and structure. They are communal traits. If we believe that our American society and its antecedent Anglo-Saxon and continental (European) cultures have given us a higher degree of individuation and personal autonomy than that possible to attain in most previous human cultures, we should look to the quality of social feeling and *empathy for persons* inherent in our specific traditions that supports those values. The "free" individual is thus a social creation. Only a rich social *morale* can foster and reproduce such persons, and the nexus of that creativeness is within community, and by means of the institutions that a sense of community sustains.

Defining tradition in this context as the shared identity and historically conditioned behaviors of a community, tradition is to the spiritual survival of the individual as the genetic traits are to the physical organism. A surviving community is the seat of our capacity for self-transcendence and the means for realizing our "immortality." Tradition, broadly conceived, provides the template for our psychological development - working upon the inherited biological equipment, of course, and directing the evolution of the structure we call the self. It imprints the master program by which

the socialized individual regulates and evaluates the "project" of his or her life. And it stamps that life with a sense of meaning beyond its own physical space and duration in time: Its chance to participate in a social future and achieve the self-transcendence that gives life its meaning. While analogies have their limits, it is my contention that this sense of social identity gives ultimate significance to human life and that this identity is inseparable from the collective life of a community replicated through time - analogous to the genetic programming that some biologists theorize is the basis of sacrificial behavior in the lower animals, a provision born of natural selection that enhances the chances that the "sister genes" of the self-sacrificing individual will survive. While our cultural inheritance does not lend itself to such an elegantly patterned progression as the biological, and is far more plastic and mutable, its importance for us is that of an essential "second nature;" and, despite its plasticity, the social persistence of its acquired traits is impressive.

With this conception of the essential place of tradition in on-going life, we are prepared to examine the specific cultural attributes that give rise to the demand for (and capacity to create and maintain), individual freedom of belief and conscience, that produced the Bill of Rights and the American tradition of civil liberties. We are interested especially in understanding the elements in this heritage that offer continuing support for the survival of freedom of conscience and humanistic democracy. And finally, we must ask whether contemporary humanism contains adequately the elements of a freedom-nurturing *respect for tradition* that can enable it to evolve the institutions and shape the social habits that can sustain a society that is both free and morally cohesive.

While the courage to defy dehumanizing conventions and sterile and regressive ideologies is a necessary and praiseworthy part of the temperamental profile of the humanist - and of the progressive democrat and the scientific worker generally - the ability to work at a common "project" sustained over many lifetimes is also a requisite for scientific and cultural progress.

As an American humanist movement, and more broadly as a humanist movement in the tradition of Western culture, we should use as advantageously as possible the resources of our particular heritage. Attention to this complex and pluralistic culture is not a parochial undertaking, despite the fear of compromising humanism's universalism. To understand our past makes us better members of a world humanism that incorporates a wide array of cultural settings. Bluntly, if America is not a melting pot, but an orchestra of mutually interactive but distinctive ethnic and cultural communities, then we should no more suppose that a united world community can be achieved on the model of a planetary cauldron in which all cultures are fused.

The conditions of life and thought capable of producing a document as far-reaching in its proffered liberties as the American Bill of Rights have occurred only rarely in human existence. A long preparation in both America and Europe laid the foundation for the Revolution and for the flowering of dissent that both produced the event of 1776 and expanded because of it. It has been argued that the American Revolution was but the second act of a play on

which the curtain had opened in England nearly a century earlier, in the Whig triumph of 1688. But as suggested earlier in this paper, we select a much more remote starting date. While no point in history can be the absolute zero milestone for anything, we take as our beginning the landing in England of William and his Norman army in the autumn of 1066. By act, the English people (already a highly diverse mixture of ethnic strains misleadingly labeled "Anglo Saxon") became plebeians in their own land. This oft-told tale of conquest and assimilation, enacted with slight variations so ubiquitously in universal history, took an epochal turn for world civilization when the Norman French landed near Dover seven hundred nine years and nine months prior to the promulgation of the Declaration of Independence.

From King William's coronation to Lord Cornwallis' surrender, to Appomatox Courthouse, to the waters off Newfoundland where Churchill and Roosevelt issued the Atlantic Charter, and to the present, the English-speaking peoples have engaged in the most protracted, most extensive, and generally most successful struggle for individual freedom and rights of conscience in human annals. One does not have to be a cultural chauvinist to recognize the impact of that singular experience on world civilization.

But while William and his Norman overlords were the occasion for the long struggle, they take none of the credit for the achievement. The communal life of the underclass - whose native language, manners, and values were to their conquerors synonymous with the vulgar and the uncouth - gave rise to collective habits and responses of anti-authoritarianism that made the national character one of sustained resistance to the court culture and its religious establishment. It must be underscored that this development preceded the "official" Protestant reformation, which was directed from the top downward, by nearly two centuries - if we begin counting only from the Lollard enthusiasm of Wycliffe's "poor preachers," who galvanized the lower classes of England into what was both a social and a religious revolution. Lollardy was never suppressed, despite fitful persecution; and attributes of English dissent that are often described as Calvinist and Puritan (both representative of the "high" ecclesiastical parties of Protestantism) in fact antedate those establishment reformers by many generations - a glaring instance of refusing to acknowledge a fact of history until its "official" representatives have entered upon the stage. Lollard dissent and separatism represented a far more radicalizing and democratizing force than the establishment forms of Protestantism that later attempted to supercede and humble them; and, indeed, as the resistance to Calvinist encroachments by Cromwell's army of radical separatists would prove, the old dissidents never surrendered to the establishment Calvinism of the Presbyterian-Puritan faction (even though the Calvinists shared the same Pauline-Augustian theology already familiar to the Lollardized masses from the preaching of Wycliffe's Poor Brothers). A historian of the Lollard-separatist tradition, Thomas Cuming Hall, summed up the matter by observing that on Cromwell's death the official Calvinist (Presbyterian) party betrayed their separatist rivals and were in turn betrayed by the Restoration. The left wing of the popular republican forces of the Commonwealth period, remembered especially for the two of their more organized and identifiable factions, John Lilburne's radically democratic Levellers, and Gerard Winstanley's anti-clerical Christian communist Diggers, consisted of a complex assortment of

social theorists and visionaries who combined an iconoclastic, sometimes anarchistic, religious utopianism with class-conscious revolutionary politics.

Writing in the last century, Eduard Bernstein recognized the importance of this social ferment for all subsequent democratic and socialist currents, not only for Britain but for the West as a whole. His study, *Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution*, following the model of historical studies that his mentor, Friedrich Engels, had pursued, reached conclusions that church historians are only now rediscovering. The American Quaker press, for example, only during the past year has engaged in a lively discussion of the findings of a contemporary Quaker historian who has put forward impressive evidence that earlier Quaker writers minimized or neglected the extent of the social and political radicalism (and a concomitant religious radicalism) that characterized the fledging Quaker movement. At a time when Quaker agitation swept much of the laboring and artisan classes of England, causing tremors even in New England and the American South, their leading preachers included a number of the militant radical of the Commonwealth and Restoration periods, not all of whom restricted their revolutionary doctrine to the realm of the spirit. One of them, James Naylor, for a time rivaled George Fox himself as leader of the popular movement (which was not yet a sect), and frightened parliament into devoting "weeks and months to this affair" (Bernstein), following a mass demonstration in Bristol with Naylor acting out the role of Christ entering Jerusalem, complete with palm branches and jubilant hordes. Until the presently ongoing revision of Quaker history, Quakers had dismissed the Bristol episode, which came close to actual rebellion, as a momentary enthusiasm and a sign of Naylor's psychological breakdown. But as Bernstein remarked of the the imprisonment and public ban placed on Naylor by Parliament, "Such a prohibition, and so appalling a punishment, would not be pronounced against a man who is considered insane...But Naylor's writings and letters show no trace of mental aberration."

Naylor's social gospel was a radical "liberation theology" couched in the mystical-apocalyptic symbols of 17th century egalitarianism. Early in his career he had been imprisoned for blasphemy for denying the physical resurrection of Christ. His Saviour was a carbon copy of the avenging messiah of the impoverished and oppressed who had been proclaimed by the Lollard "poor brothers" in England nearly three centuries earlier, and by kindred Anabaptist "prophets" in Europe until crushed in the suppression of the left-wing Reformation - with Luther's blessing.

This story is no excursion into the esoterica of a minor sect. Lilborne, like many of his followers, became a Quaker. So also did John Bellers, a major figure of political idealism and democratic feeling, to whom Bernstein devoted his concluding chapter, as "Champion of the Poor and Advocate of a League of Nations." Sir Henry Vane, parliamentary leader after the death of Pym an enemy of Cromwell's royalist ambitions, moved in a circle of advanced democratic radicals that included Naylor and other Quaker and like-minded dissidents. (Vane while still a young man had served briefly as governor of the infant colony of Massachusetts, but had been dismissed by the Puritan leadership for alleged theological irregularity and soon returned to England.) The Quakers were but the most long-lived survivors of a

democratic-radical tendency committed to social equality and liberty of conscience ("soul liberty") that moved the majority of "Round heads" of Cromwell's army and its political 'partisans. (George Fox recorded in his *Journal* that he had received the doctrine of "soul liberty" from a conventicle of Baptists he had encountered in his youth.) English Baptists, "Brownists" (progenators of the Pilgrims of Plymouth), refugee Anabaptists and Mennonites from the continent, Quakers, and sects long forgotten, made up a Joseph's coat of dissent that even half a century later caused the young Voltaire to marvel in admiration of English religious diversity - pluralism, as our century would call it - with some thirty sects, he noted, living peaceably side by side.

If Voltaire had spent his youthful exile in the Netherlands instead of England, he would have noted a similar evolution in that country - radical, often militant Anabaptist and related sects, frequently preaching violent revolution on republican-egalitarian principles, being finally scattered by "legitimate" pro-royalist Calvinist establishmentarians, and only then gradually subsiding into the quietistic, pacifist folk recognizable as Mennonites in ages since. The many parallels in these movements in England and Holland - and in Germany, Poland, Bohemia and elsewhere on the continent, until they were drowned in blood - gives us a comparative basis for studying the factors that make for persistent grassroots dissent in a culture. But only in Britain, and on a smaller scale in Holland, were circumstances favorable for their survival in strength. (The Jewish experience of communal self-rule within their confined ethnic boundaries offers a highly distinctive case history of the nurturing of a community of divergent conscience over many centuries.)

Thanks to the planting of the American colonies there was a continental "hothouse" to which these tender growths could be transplanted. And thanks especially to the desire of the British Crown to remove dissent across a broad ocean - and to make a profit by so doing - several colonies came into being as a vast pale of refuge. (The practical reward for tolerance was not lost on Penn, who combined an idealist's conscience with a real estate promoter's sagacity. By the time of the Revolution, Philadelphia was the largest city in the British Empire, save only London - and Pennsylvania was gaining on Virginia in statewide population -- to the delight of Jefferson and Madison who gleefully pointed out to their fellow Virginians the advantages of attracting prosperity with the boon of religious freedom.)

By short but steady steps, the Crown came to recognize the practicality of maintaining a truce with the dissenting population of America, to the frequent neglect of its own Anglican establishment in Virginia and other colonies. The London authorities gave the Calverts a refuge for Catholics and other nonconforming faiths (which the Lords Baltimore were shrewd enough to share with a wide variety of sects). Roger Williams got his Charter from a Commonwealth Parliament disposed to buffer their dissenting brothers in New England from the doctrinaire Puritans of Massachusetts, who were held in no more favor by Roundheads than their British high-Calvinist counterparts. And finally, after the Restoration, the Crown intervened to halt the persecution - that had included hanging - of Quakers who had defied the Massachusetts ban.

This chain of events, which arrayed both the Stuart kings and the Cromwellians against the high Calvinism of the Puritan party, requires us to revise a common interpretation of our American religious history with respect to the tradition of religious liberty. The popular wisdom has it that a succession of sects came to America as persecuted minorities, only to set themselves up as a religious establishment and persecute others in turn. Nothing could be more contrary to the facts. Those who subscribed to the tradition of dissent, of "soul liberty" - and who in consequence of this conviction denied the right of the legal power to intervene in matters of conscience - remained remarkably consistent in this position through many generations. The popular wisdom is based on the deplorable habit of labeling all non-Anglo-Catholic Protestantism of the 17th century as "Puritan." Always an elite, the Puritans were a party, originally within the Angelican church, who sought, not disestablishment, but rigorous reconstruction of the state religion in conformity with their high-Calvinist ecclesiasticism. The confusion is easy to come by. Except for the "spirituals," mystics who like the Quakers subordinated creed and scriptures to the direct guidance of the inner light, most of the dissenting Protestants of England subscribed to the stern predestinarian theology of Wycliffe, derived from an older and more ascetic Augustinian Catholicism (but attributed by popular belief wholly to the New Testament). Unlike the separatists, Calvin was an ecclesiastic totally of the continental establishmentarian mentality. He accepted the historic succession of the ordained clergy, the authority of the early ecumenical councils - including the historic creeds they had produced - a modified sacrament of communion, and the duty of the state to support the true faith and suppress heresy (his approval of the burning of Servetus in Geneva serving as the most dramatic example). The separatists generally rejected all of this out of hand. The visible church consisted of any band of convinced believers, bodies such as their voluntarily gathered and frequently outlawed conventicles; the historic succession of the clergy was disregarded or rejected, and communion was reduced to a common meal of remembrance. The authoritative teaching power of the church dissolved into the authority of the individual conscience guided by the Holy Spirit in the light of scripture. And for the Quaker, even scripture generally took a secondary place to the direct inspiration of the conscience by the inner light. These teachings are not to be confused with rationalism, deism, and free thought; but with such independency of individual judgment at large, rationalism and free thought could not be far behind. Not only did the Society of Friends produce Thomas Paine (who, like many of his time, could not live within the confinements of the sect), but the mind-set of Paine's enthusiastic lower-class mass following in England, during the French Revolution, was the outcome of a centuries-long incubation of Lollard-Separatist independency joined to the advancing skepticism of the Enlightenment. This hybrid species, combining the social habits and egalitarian traditions of the old dissent with the newer skepticism that derived from the emerging sciences and speculative philosophy, produced the Age of Reason, first crystalizing in Britain into a post-Lockean-Newtonian deistic mode and then, once the ferment crossed the channel, into the more uncompromising, and often atheistic, version of the French. (One may call this a re-crossing of the Straits of Dover, since on the scientific, speculative side of the hybrid, the parental stock stemmed substantially from continental humanism and the recent revolution in mathematics and science, resting on foundations laid by Galileo and Descartes.)

The point of these observations is to stress the intimate interplay of the two sources of contemporary democratic humanism, especially as it exists in the United States. Our understanding of the nature and social function of the humanist philosophy must remain incomplete - and handicap us for pursuit of our historical task - if we devalue either side of the dual history that generated our movement and sustains its intellectual and ethical mission.

The authors of the constitutional separation of church and state, principally Jefferson and Madison, but including Mason and others, were able to succeed only because of the existence of a fortunate alliance in favor of disestablishment; a coalition of Enlightenment rationalists of the upper class deistic type (including a number of the Founding Fathers) and a grassroots movement of evangelical separatists, especially frontier Baptists and Presbyterians (the ministers of the latter wavering for a time in Virginia, but finally coming down - in deference to lay opinion - on the side of Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance of 1785), with the successful examples of Pennsylvania and Rhode Island to guide them, as I have recounted elsewhere. (See, *American Freedom and the Radical Right*, 1982, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.; and my forthcoming book, *America. the Dream Never Dies*, also to be published by Ungar.)

Jefferson and Madison both furnish superb biographical examples of the Enlightenment character, combining the moral passion and love of mental liberty embodied in the Anglo-American tradition of spiritual independence with the urbane pleasure in the free play of ideas that expressed the best of Renaissance humanism and the rise of modern science. In them, the Whig love of individual liberty - heir to so much of the Lollard and Roundhead experience - found a perfect flowering. Deism and reason (as they conceived it) formed a bridge by which they crossed from the supernatural world-view of the ancestral Christianity to the essentially secularized outlook of the Enlightenment. It was the watershed between two contrasting religions, and in that respect the deists were architects of the contemporary world, as even the most progressive of the separatists could never be (except by imbibing generous drafts of deistic rationalism under the mask of theological symbol and language).

The effect of the watershed is apparent when we contrast the concept of unqualified religious freedom as put forth by Jefferson and Madison with the outer boundaries of Christian tolerance or *soul liberty* as allowed by even such noble examples of Christian freedom as Roger Williams, the Calverts of Maryland, and William Penn. With them, the stream of tolerance was broad and placid, but necessarily confined within the embankments of theistic fidelity. A loyalty oath to God lurked behind every grant of religious tolerance; and while the Quaker Penn may not have approved of oaths, a profession of faith in God was nevertheless required of those receiving toleration under Penn's frame of government. Even the great John Locke, who had advised his admirer Penn on his proposed constitution, remained orthodox on the essential point of insisting that faith in God is necessary for good citizenship. But Locke's bolder disciples, beginning with Shaftesbury, cut loose from this stricture; and while Shaftesbury and the non-Christian deists who followed in his footsteps professed to believe in an intelligence behind nature, for them obedience to the divine mandate was not a matter of

faith or profession of belief. Deistic piety consisted of humility before the facts of nature, respect for truth in the every-day meaning of truth. This meant free inquiry, honest observation of nature and nature's laws, and respect for the dictates of reason. Jefferson, who had read and admired Shaftesbury from his youth, could argue from such premises that it makes no difference whether my neighbor believes in twenty gods or no god. The honest atheist may be an exemplary citizen, but the religious bigot can never be. We can know nothing about the nature of the Creator; deity remains "undefinable," except for the attributes of perfection and benevolence which we find - so Jefferson believed - manifest in the order of nature. Morality too is built within our natures, so that an uneducated gardener may be, and often is, a more principled person than a skilled logician.

Armed with this doctrine, Jefferson could do battle with any notion that religious profession or belief was necessary for good citizenship, or was even a proper question for public inquiry. We would do well to let it alone. The practical effect of Jefferson's analysis, while deistic in formal structure, was a thoroughgoing secularism. Having retained deity as a postulate only of nature's orderliness and moral lawfulness, Jefferson's system did not, and could not, look beyond secular values and consequences for its conception of the good. Beyond the secular realm - "nature," in Jefferson's parlance - no light came. A purer agnosticism could hardly be framed, except for retention of a purely hypothetical primordial Creator that had set the universe upon its orderly course, a necessary closure of their logic to account for the origin of a perfect self-regulating system of natural order.

Theologians once debated whether deism was a species of theism or a disguised denial of theism - an atheism in Sunday dress. It appears in this context that as Jefferson and deists of his persuasion understood it, deism shared with the revealed religions (theism as expressed in both Judaism and Christianity) only the elements of belief in (1) a universe manifesting intelligent design in its structure and operation and (2) a monillaw, which theists based on revelation, but which deists insisted human beings could know through the combined functions of intuition and reason. (The popular writers on deism, including Jefferson, as lay philosophers were not entirely consistent in relating the rational and the intuitive in human nature.) With the deity removed to the purely theoretical position of an axiom of their science, they produced *thejirst ideologically powerful expression in modern times of a consistently secular world view*. Religion retained its place in the privacy of the heart - primarily as a reflective piety born of gratitude for the gift of being - but theology was retired in favor of scientific investigation. That deism lies in spirit on the agnostic-naturalistic side of the theological watershed is illustrated in the popular literature of religious polemic. The most virulent attacks upon deists have come from supernaturalists, while the most spirited defenders of the deists throughout the 19th and 20th centuries have been skeptics and secularists. Jefferson himself knew where the battle line was drawn; his greatest biographer, Dumas Malone, has written that Jefferson from his youth hated supernaturalism and that, as the years lengthened, his attitude became one of bitterness.

The conclusion that we draw from this history is that modern humanism as we know it in the English-speaking world and throughout much of the West -

for all its departures from Lollardry, Roundhead radical nonconformity, and grassroots deism of the militant variety preached by Paine, (or the more sophisticated form discreetly held by Jefferson and his circle) - this humanism is a legitimate living branch of the old populist tree.

Because evangelical Christians have wrapped themselves so securely in the banners of Wycliffe's spiritual rebellion, and have taken his biblicism as their intellectual redoubt, freethinkers have neglected to recognize their own inheritance in a social and libertarian movement that contained a radical as well as a conservative wing. The fundamentalist-tending biblicism of the conservative separatists was paralleled by the anti-authoritarian "spirituals," who despite their subjectivity and extravagant fantasy succeeded in eventually making personal experience and the informed conscience the seat of moral and religious authority. While conscience was initially "informed" or illuminated by a supernatural light, as in the doctrine of the Quakers, this was the launching of a steady and inevitable historical glide into the free flight of the (intuitive) sense of the right. By the time of Winstanley, three and a half centuries ago, the preoccupation of the radical tradition was clearly turning from heaven to earth, from theology to sociology - or rather to a secular theology of class liberation in the here and now. Crushed at the end of the Commonwealth, these dreams rose to live again in the century that produced the Enlightenment and the revolutions in America and France.

Humanists, who have done well in cultivating their classical heritage from Greece, the Renaissance, and the Age of Enlightenment might look more closely and sympathetically at what might be called the maternal side of the ancestral family.

In recovering that historical identity as our own, humanists can gain a sense of institutional continuity with the culture in which we live. Without that identity, as humanists we remain "outsiders," disinherited progeny alienated from their past and therefore lacking the cohesive powers to unite sufficiently, even among themselves, to build future community.

Our destiny involves recognizing that Jefferson and his circle laid the foundation upon which contemporary American humanism stands, continuous with a moral and intellectual tradition that has wended its course over nearly a thousand years to arrive at a principle of freedom that is beyond mere tolerance or "Christian liberty," an inherent *right* to be free that, as Jefferson and his compatriots conceived it, is ours by virtue of the conjunction of our social and rational natures. The way we proceed to justify rationally the ground of that right may have changed as science and philosophy have changed, but we remain within a tradition that has worked its way relentlessly to a more adequate way of addressing the two interrelated questions that remain for us the key issues of life itself: *personal liberty and the social good*. In the tradition that asks those questions and answers them in an historically distinct way, we find the elements of our "second nature," building blocks with which we can construct the institutions of a surviving community.