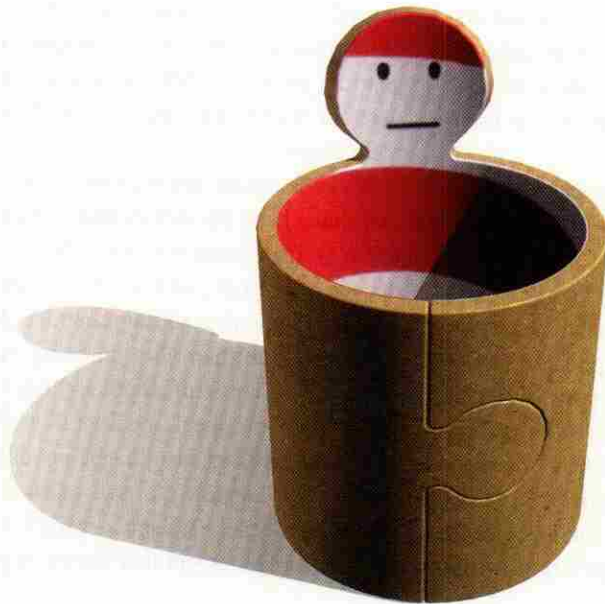


AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR A NEW PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

by MICHAEL J. SANDEL



Despite their disagreements, liberals and conservatives share an impoverished vision of citizenship, leaving them unable to address the anxiety and frustration abroad in the land. If American politics is to recover its civic voice, it must find a way to debate questions we have forgotten how to ask

AS another presidential election season unfolds, Americans remain frustrated with politics and unhappy with the alternatives the parties have to offer. Our public life is rife with discontent. President Clinton, who recently spoke of trying to lift Americans from their national "funk," attributes the discontent to the insecurity of jobs in the global economy. His solution is to equip Americans, through federally supported education and job-training programs, to "compete and win" in the global economy. Republicans, on the other hand, interpret the discontent as unhappiness with big government. Their solution is to scale back the federal government, reduce regulation, and devolve power to states and localities.

The problem, though, runs deeper than these diagnoses suggest; it concerns the public philosophy by which we live and the conception of citizenship that informs our political debates. American politics has lost its civic voice. Despite their disagreements, liberals and conservatives share an impoverished vision of citizenship, leaving them unable to address the anxiety and frustration abroad in the land.

For the past half century Democrats and Republicans have debated the role of government in the market economy and the proper scope of rights and entitlements. But this debate does not speak to the two concerns at the heart of our discontent. One is the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives. The

other is the sense that, from family to neighborhood to nation, the moral fabric of community is unraveling around us. These two fears define the anxiety of the age.

LIBERAL VERSUS REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

THE central idea of the public philosophy by which we live is that freedom consists in our capacity to choose our ends for ourselves. Politics should not try to form the character or cultivate the virtue of its citizens, for to do so would be to "legislate morality." Government should not affirm, through its policies or laws, any particular conception of the good life; instead it should provide a neutral framework of rights within which people can choose their own values and ends.

The aspiration to neutrality finds prominent expression in our politics and law. Although it derives from the liberal tradition of political thought, its province is not limited to those known as liberals, rather than conservatives, in American politics; it can be found across the political spectrum. Liberals invoke the ideal of neutrality when opposing school prayer or restrictions on abortion or attempts by Christian fundamentalists to bring their morality into the public square. Conservatives appeal to neutrality when opposing attempts by government to impose certain moral restraints—for the sake of workers' safety or environmental protection or distributive justice—on the operation of the market economy.

The ideal of free choice also figures on both sides of the debate over the welfare state. Republicans have long complained that taxing the rich to pay for welfare programs for the poor is a form of coerced charity that violates people's freedom to choose what to do with their own money. Democrats have long replied that government must assure all citizens a decent level of income, housing, education, and health care, on the grounds that those who are crushed by economic necessity are not truly free to exercise choice in other domains. Despite their disagreement about how government should act to respect individual choice, both sides assume that freedom consists in the capacity of people to choose their own ends.

So familiar is this vision of freedom that it might seem a permanent feature of the American political tradition. But as a reigning public philosophy, it is a recent arrival, a development of the past half century. Its distinctive character can best be seen by comparison with a rival public philosophy that it gradually displaced: a version of republican political theory.

Central to republican theory is the idea that liberty depends on sharing in self-government. This idea is not by itself inconsistent with liberal freedom. Participating in politics can be one among the ways in which people choose to pursue their individual ends. According to republican polit-

ical theory, however, sharing in self-rule involves something more. It involves deliberating with fellow citizens about the common good and helping to shape the destiny of the political community. But to deliberate well about the common good requires more than the capacity to choose one's ends and to respect others' rights to do the same. It requires a knowledge of public affairs and also a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake. To share in self-rule therefore requires that citizens possess, or come to acquire, certain civic virtues. But this means that republican politics cannot be neutral toward the values and ends its citizens espouse. The republican conception of freedom, unlike the liberal conception, requires a formative politics, a politics that cultivates in citizens the qualities of character that self-government requires.

Both the liberal and the republican understandings of freedom have been present throughout our political experience, but in shifting measure and relative importance. In recent decades the civic, or formative, aspect of our politics has given way to a procedural republic, concerned less with cultivating virtue than with enabling persons to choose their own values. This shift sheds light on our present discontent. For despite its appeal, the liberal vision of freedom lacks the civic resources to sustain self-government. The public philosophy by which we live cannot secure the liberty it promises, because it cannot inspire the sense of community and civic engagement that liberty requires.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CITIZENSHIP

IF American politics is to recover its civic voice, it must find a way to debate questions we have forgotten how to ask. Consider the way we think and argue about economics today, in contrast to the way Americans debated economic policy through much of our history. These days most of our economic arguments revolve around two considerations: prosperity and fairness. Whatever tax policies or budget proposals or regulatory schemes people may favor, they usually defend them on the grounds that they will increase the size of the economic pie or distribute the pieces of the pie more fairly or both.

So familiar are these ways of justifying economic policy that they might seem to exhaust the possibilities. But our debates about economic policy have not always focused solely on the size and the distribution of the national product. Throughout much of American history they have also addressed a different question: What economic arrangements are most hospitable to self-government?

Thomas Jefferson gave classic expression to the civic strand of economic argument. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) he argued against developing large-scale domestic manufactures on the grounds that the agrarian way of



life made for virtuous citizens, well suited to self-government. "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God," he wrote—the embodiments of "genuine virtue." The political economists of Europe claimed that every nation should manufacture for itself, but Jefferson worried that large-scale manufacturing would create a propertyless class, lacking the independence that republican citizenship requires: "Dependance begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." Jefferson thought it better to "let our work-shops remain in Europe" and avoid the moral corruption they brought; better to import manufactured goods than the manners and habits that attended their production. "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body," he wrote. "It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution."

Whether to encourage domestic manufacturing or to retain the nation's agrarian character was the subject of intense debate in the early decades of the republic. In the end, Jefferson's agrarian vision did not prevail. But the republican assumption underlying his economics—that public policy should cultivate the qualities of character that self-government requires—found broader support and a longer career. From the Revolution to the Civil War the political economy of citizenship played a prominent role in American national debate. In fact, the civic strand of economic argument extended even into the twentieth century, when Progressives grappled with big business and its consequences for self-government.

THE CURSE OF BIGNESS

THE political predicament of the Progressive Era bears a striking similarity to our own. Then as now, Americans sensed the unraveling of community and feared for the prospects of self-government. Then as now, there was a gap, or a lack of fit, between the scale of economic life and the terms in which people conceived their identities—a gap that many experienced as disorienting and disempowering. The threat to self-government at the turn of the century took two forms: the concentration of power amassed by giant corporations, and the erosion of those traditional forms of authority and community that had governed the lives of most Americans through the first century of the republic. A national economy dominated by vast cor-

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porations diminished the autonomy of local communities, traditionally the site of self-government. Meanwhile, the growth of large, impersonal cities, teeming with immigrants, poverty, and disorder, led many to fear that Americans lacked sufficient moral and civic cohesiveness to govern according to a shared vision of the good life.

Despite the dislocation they wrought, the new forms of industry, transportation, and communication seemed to offer a new, broader basis for political community. In many ways Americans of the early twentieth century were more closely connected than ever before. Railroads spanned the continent. The telephone, the telegraph, and the daily newspaper brought people into contact with events in distant places. And a complex industrial system connected people in a vast scheme of interdependence that coordinated their labors. Some saw in the new industrial and technological interdependence a more expansive form of community. “Steam has given us electricity and has made the nation a neighborhood,” wrote William Allen White. “The electric wire, the iron pipe, the street railroad, the daily newspaper, the telephone, the lines of transcontinental traffic by rail and water . . . have made us all of one body—socially, industrially, politically. . . . It is possible for all men to understand one another.”

More sober observers were not so sure. That Americans found themselves implicated in a complex scheme of interdependence did not guarantee that they would identify with that scheme or come to share a life with the unknown others who were similarly implicated. As the social reformer Jane Addams observed, “Theoretically, ‘the division of labor’ makes men more interdependent and human by drawing them together into a unity of purpose.” But whether this unity of purpose is achieved depends on whether the participants take pride in their common project and regard it as their own; “the mere mechanical fact of interdependence amounts to nothing.”

Political debate in the Progressive Era focused on two different responses to the power of big business. Some sought to preserve self-government by decentralizing economic power and thus bringing it under democratic control. Others considered economic concentration irreversible and sought to control it by enlarging the capacity of national democratic institutions. The decentralizing strand of progressivism found its ablest advocate in Louis D. Brandeis, who before

his appointment to the Supreme Court was an activist attorney and an outspoken critic of industrial concentration. Brandeis’s primary concern was with the civic consequences of economic arrangements. He opposed monopolies and trusts not because their market power led to higher consumer prices but because their political power undermined democratic government.

In Brandeis’s view, big business threatened self-government in two ways—directly, by overwhelming democratic institutions and defying their control, and indirectly, by eroding the moral and civic capacities that equip workers to think and act as citizens. Brandeis brought long-standing republican themes into the twentieth-century debate: like Jefferson, he viewed concentrated power, whether economic or political, as inimical to liberty. His solution was not to confront big business with big government—that would only compound “the curse of bigness”—but to break up the trusts and restore competition. Only in this way would it be possible to preserve a decentralized economy of locally based enterprises amenable to democratic control.

Brandeis favored industrial democracy not for the sake of improving workers’ incomes, desirable though that was, but for the sake of improving their civic capacities. For him, the formation of citizens capable of self-government was an end even higher than distributive justice. “We Americans are committed not only to social justice in the sense of avoiding . . . [an] unjust distribution of wealth; but we are committed primarily to democracy.” The “striving for democracy” was inseparable from a “striving for the development of men,” he said. “It is absolutely essential in order that men may develop that they be properly fed and properly housed, and that they have proper opportunities of education and recreation. We cannot reach our goal without those things. But we may have all those things and have a nation of slaves.”

THE NEW NATIONALISM

THE other branch of the Progressive movement offered a different response to the threat posed by corporate power. Rather than decentralize the economy, Theodore Roosevelt proposed a “New Nationalism” to regulate big business by increasing the capacity of the national government.

Like Brandeis, Roosevelt feared the political consequences of concentrated economic power. Where Roosevelt disagreed with the decentralizers was over how to reassert democratic authority. He considered big business an inevitable product of industrial development and saw little point in trying to recover the decentralized political economy of the nineteenth century. Since most big corporations operated in interstate or foreign commerce, beyond the reach of individual states, only the federal government was suited to the task of controlling them. The power of the national government had to grow to match the scale of corporate power.

Like republicans since Jefferson's time, Roosevelt worried about the civic consequences of economic arrangements. His aim was not only to reduce the domination of government by big business but also to enlarge the self-understanding of American citizens, to instill what he called "a genuine and permanent moral awakening," "a spirit of broad and far-reaching nationalism." More than a program of institutional reform, the New Nationalism was a formative project that sought to cultivate a new sense of national citizenship.

Roosevelt was the leading spokesman for the New Nationalism; Herbert Croly was its leading philosopher. In *The Promise of American Life* (1909), Croly laid out the political theory underlying the nationalist strand of progressivism: given "the increasing concentration of American industrial, political, and social life," American government "demands more rather than less centralization." But, according to Croly, the success of democracy also required the nationalization of politics. The primary form of political community had to be recast on a national scale. This was the way to ease the gap, felt so acutely in the Progressive Era, between the scale of American life and the terms of American identity. Given the national scale of the modern economy, democracy required "an increasing nationalization of the American people in ideas, in institutions, and in spirit."

Although Croly renounced Jefferson's notion that democracy depends on dispersed power, he shared Jefferson's conviction that economic and political arrangements should be judged by the qualities of character they promote. For him, the project of nationalizing the American character was "an essentially formative and enlightening political transformation." American democracy could advance only as the nation became more of a nation, which required in turn a civic education that inspired in Americans a deeper sense of national identity.

The decentralizing and nationalizing versions of Progressive reform found memorable expression in the 1912 contest between Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt. In retrospect, however, the greater significance of that campaign lies in the assumptions the protagonists shared. Brandeis and Wilson on one side, and Croly and Roosevelt on the other, agreed despite their differences that economic and political

institutions should be assessed for their tendency to promote or erode the moral qualities that self-government requires. Like Jefferson before them, they worried about the sort of citizens that the economic arrangements of their day were likely to produce. They argued, in different ways, for a political economy of citizenship.

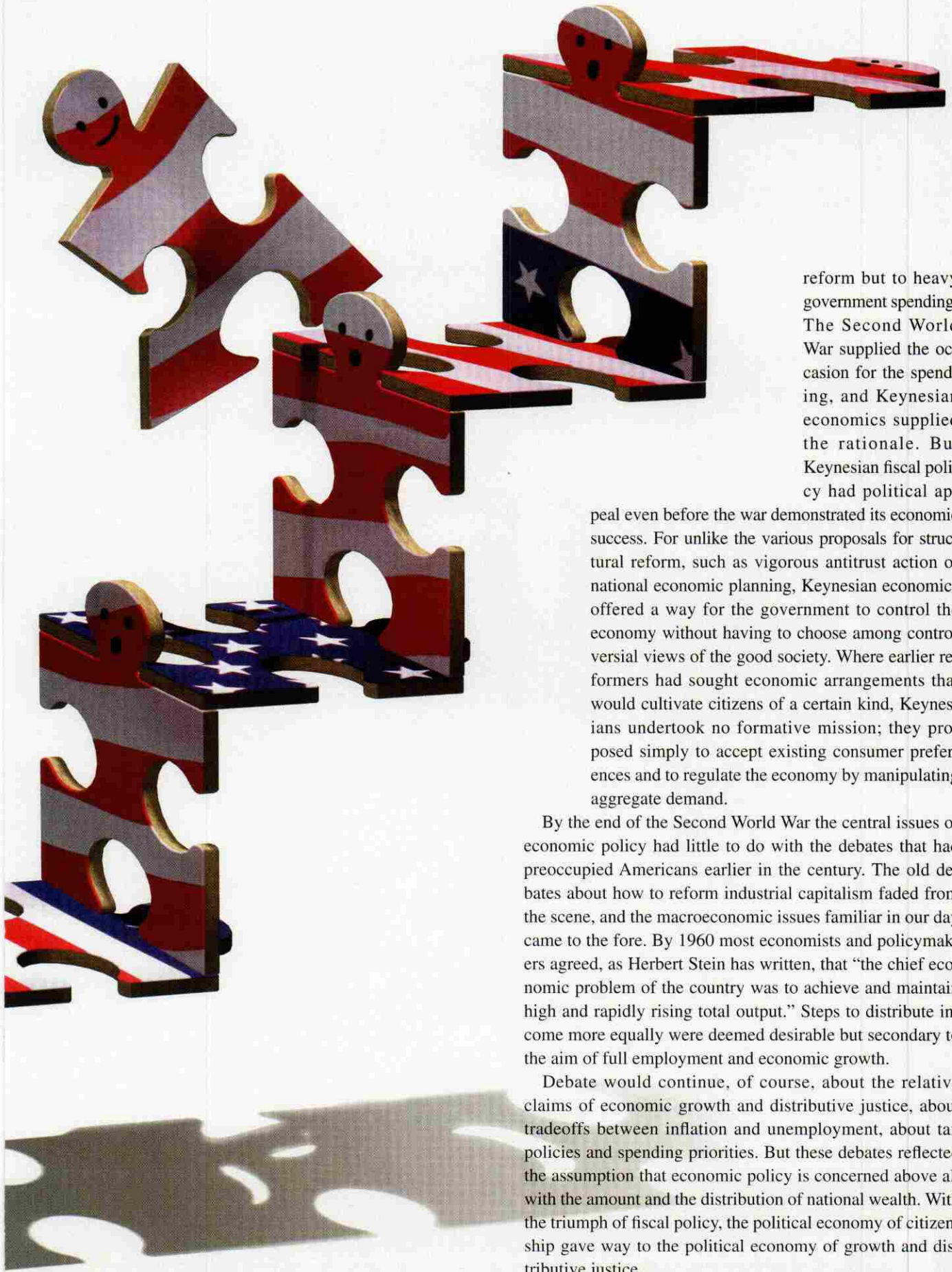
The economic arguments of our day bear little resemblance to the issues that divided the Progressive reformers. They were concerned with the structure of the economy and debated how to preserve democratic government in the face of concentrated economic power. We are concerned with the overall level of economic output and debate how to promote economic growth while assuring broad access to the fruits of prosperity. In retrospect it is possible to identify the moment when our economic questions displaced theirs. Beginning in the late New Deal and culminating in the early 1960s the political economy of growth and distributive justice displaced the political economy of citizenship.

THE NEW DEAL AND THE KEYNESIAN REVOLUTION

AS the New Deal began, political debate continued to reflect the alternatives defined in the Progressive Era. When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office, in the midst of the Depression, two traditions of reform offered competing approaches to economic recovery. One group of reformers, heirs to the philosophy of Louis Brandeis, sought to decentralize the economy through antitrust laws and other measures aimed at restoring competition. Another group, indebted to the New Nationalism of Teddy Roosevelt, sought to rationalize the economy through national economic planning. Despite their differences, both the antitrusters and the planners assumed that overcoming the Depression required a change in the structure of industrial capitalism. They also agreed that the concentration of power in the economy, left to its own devices, posed a threat to democratic government.

The competition between these approaches persisted, unresolved, through much of the New Deal. In different policies and different moods Roosevelt experimented with both, never fully embracing or rejecting either. In the end neither the antitrusters nor the planners prevailed. Recovery, when it came, was due not to structural





reform but to heavy government spending. The Second World War supplied the occasion for the spending, and Keynesian economics supplied the rationale. But Keynesian fiscal policy had political appeal

even before the war demonstrated its economic success. For unlike the various proposals for structural reform, such as vigorous antitrust action or national economic planning, Keynesian economics offered a way for the government to control the economy without having to choose among controversial views of the good society. Where earlier reformers had sought economic arrangements that would cultivate citizens of a certain kind, Keynesians undertook no formative mission; they proposed simply to accept existing consumer preferences and to regulate the economy by manipulating aggregate demand.

By the end of the Second World War the central issues of economic policy had little to do with the debates that had preoccupied Americans earlier in the century. The old debates about how to reform industrial capitalism faded from the scene, and the macroeconomic issues familiar in our day came to the fore. By 1960 most economists and policymakers agreed, as Herbert Stein has written, that "the chief economic problem of the country was to achieve and maintain high and rapidly rising total output." Steps to distribute income more equally were deemed desirable but secondary to the aim of full employment and economic growth.

Debate would continue, of course, about the relative claims of economic growth and distributive justice, about tradeoffs between inflation and unemployment, about tax policies and spending priorities. But these debates reflected the assumption that economic policy is concerned above all with the amount and the distribution of national wealth. With the triumph of fiscal policy, the political economy of citizenship gave way to the political economy of growth and distributive justice.

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KEYNESIANISM AND LIBERALISM

THE advent of the new political economy marked a decisive moment in the demise of the republican strand of American politics and the rise of contemporary liberalism. According to this liberalism, government should be neutral as to conceptions of the good life, in order to respect persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own ends. Keynesian fiscal policy both reflected this liberalism and deepened its hold on American public life. Although those who practiced Keynesian economics did not defend it in precisely these terms, the new political economy displayed two features of the liberalism that defines the procedural republic. First, it offered policymakers and elected officials a way to "bracket," or set aside, controversial views of the good society, and so promised a consensus that programs for structural reform could not offer. Second, by abandoning the formative project, it denied government a stake in the moral character of its citizens and affirmed the notion of persons as free and independent selves.

The clearest expression of faith in the new economics as a neutral instrument of national governance was offered by President John F. Kennedy. In a commencement address at Yale University in 1962 he argued that modern economic problems could best be resolved if people set aside their ideological convictions. "The central domestic issues of our time," he observed, "are more subtle and less simple" than the large moral and political issues that commanded the nation's attention in earlier days. "They relate not to basic clashes of philosophy or ideology but to ways and means of reaching common goals. . . . What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country with passion but the practical management of a modern economy." Kennedy urged the country "to face technical problems without ideological preconceptions" and to focus on "the sophisticated and technical questions involved in keeping a great economic machinery moving ahead."

As Keynesian fiscal policy took hold in the 1960s, the civic strand of economic argument faded from American political discourse. Confronted with an economy too vast to admit republican hopes of mastery, and tempted by the

prospect of prosperity, Americans of the postwar decades found their way to a new understanding of freedom. According to this understanding, our liberty depends not on our capacity as citizens to share in shaping the forces that govern our collective destiny but rather on our capacity as persons to choose our values and ends for ourselves.

From the standpoint of republican political theory, this shift represents a fateful concession; to abandon the formative ambition is to abandon the project of liberty as the republican tradition conceives it. But Americans did not experience the new public philosophy as disempowering—at least not at first. To the contrary, the procedural republic appeared to be a triumph of mastery and self-command. This was owing partly to the historical moment and partly to the promise of the liberal conception of freedom.

THE MOMENT OF MASTERY

THE procedural republic was born at a rare moment of American mastery. At the end of the Second World War the United States stood astride the world, an unrivaled global power. This power, combined with the buoyant economy of the postwar decades, accustomed a generation of Americans to seeing themselves as masters of their circumstances. John Kennedy's inaugural address gave stirring expression to a generation's conviction that it possessed powers of Promethean proportions. "The world is very different now," Kennedy proclaimed. "For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." We would "pay any price, bear any burden," to assure the success of liberty.

Beyond the bounty of American power, the promise of mastery in the postwar decades had another source in the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism itself. The image of persons as free and independent selves, unbound by moral or communal ties they have not chosen, is a liberating, even exhilarating, ideal. Freed from the dictates of custom or tradition, the liberal self is installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only obligations that constrain. This image of freedom found expression across the political spectrum. Lyndon Johnson argued the case for the welfare state not in terms of communal obligation but instead in terms of

enabling people to choose their own ends: "For more than thirty years, from Social Security to the war against poverty, we have diligently worked to enlarge the freedom of man," he said upon accepting the 1964 Democratic presidential nomination. "And as a result Americans tonight are freer to live as they want to live, to pursue their ambitions, to meet their desires . . . than at any time in all of our glorious history." Welfare-rights advocates opposed work requirements, mandatory job training, and family-planning programs for welfare recipients on the grounds that all people, including the poor, "should have the freedom to choose how they may express the meaning of their lives." For their part, conservative critics of Johnson's Great Society also made their arguments in the name of the liberal conception of freedom. The only legitimate functions of government, Barry Goldwater insisted, were those that made it "possible for men to follow their chosen pursuits with maximum freedom." The libertarian economist Milton Friedman opposed Social Security and other mandatory government programs on the grounds that they violated people's rights "to live their lives by their own values."

And so for a time the special circumstances of American life obscured the passing of the civic concept of freedom. But when the moment of mastery expired—when, in 1968, Vietnam, riots in the ghettos, campus unrest, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy brought a shattering of faith—Americans were left ill equipped to contend with the dislocation that swirled about them. The liberating promise of the freely choosing self could not compensate for the loss of self-government more broadly conceived. Events spun out of control at home and abroad, and government seemed helpless to respond.

REAGAN'S CIVIC CONSERVATISM

HERE followed a season of protest that is with us still. As disillusionment with government grew, politicians groped to articulate the frustrations that the reigning political agenda did not address. The most successful, at least in electoral terms, was Ronald Reagan. Although he ultimately failed to allay the discontent he tapped, it is instructive nonetheless to consider the source of his appeal and the way it departed from the prevailing terms of political discourse.

Reagan drew, in different moods and moments, on both the libertarian and the civic strands of American conservatism. The most resonant part of his political appeal derived from the second of these, from his skillful evocation of communal values such as family and neighborhood, religion and patriotism. What set Reagan apart from laissez-faire conservatives also set him apart from the public philosophy of his day: his ability to identify with Americans' yearnings for a common life of larger meanings on a smaller, less impersonal scale than that the procedural republic provides.

Reagan blamed big government for disempowering citizens and proposed a "New Federalism" that would shift power to states and localities, recalling the long-standing republican worry about concentrated power. But Reagan revived this tradition with a difference. Previous advocates of republican political economy had worried about big government and big business alike. For Reagan, the curse of big business attached to government alone. Even as he evoked the ideal of community, he had little to say about the corrosive effects of capital flight or the disempowering consequences of economic power organized on a vast scale.

HORSES

Setting out on my bicycle alone,
I came upon the horses
drenched in bright sunshine,
yard after yard of blue-black ironed silk,
drawn before stopped traffic.

With white stars on their foreheads
and white bracelets on their legs,
each blood horse wore nothing
but a fine noseband
and a shroud of steam.

I felt lazy and vicious watching them,
with my large joints and big head,
stricken by thoughts of my brothers.
If only the barbarous horsemen
could lead *us* down the path, unestranged.

It smashed me like water galloped through.
Tottering there on my haunches,
with wide nostrils,
nipping the air as if it were green grass,
how I yearned for my neck to be brushed!

—HENRI COLE

Reagan-era Democrats did not challenge Reagan on this score, nor did they otherwise join the debate about community and self-government. Tied to the terms of rights-oriented liberalism, they missed the mood of discontent. The anxieties of the age concerned the erosion of those communities intermediate between the individual and the nation—families and neighborhoods, cities and towns, schools and congregations. But Democrats, once the party of dispersed power, had learned in recent decades to view intermediate communities with suspicion. Too often such communities had been pockets of prejudice, outposts of intolerance, places where the tyranny of the majority held sway. And so, from the New Deal to the civil-rights movement to the Great Society, the liberal project was to use federal power to vindicate individual rights that local communities had failed to protect. This unease with the middle terms of civic life, however honorably acquired, left Democrats ill equipped to attend to the erosion of self-government.

The civic strand of Reagan's rhetoric enabled him to succeed, where Democrats failed, in tapping the mood of discontent. In the end, however, Reagan's presidency did little to alter the conditions underlying the discontent. He governed more as a market conservative than as a civic conservative. The unfettered capitalism he favored did nothing to repair the moral fabric of families, neighborhoods, and communities and much to undermine them.

THE RISKS OF REPUBLICAN POLITICS

ANY attempt to revitalize the civic strand of freedom must confront two sobering objections. The first doubts that it is possible to revive republican ideals; the second doubts that it is desirable. The first objection holds that given the scale and complexity of the modern world, it is unrealistic to aspire to self-government as the republican tradition conceives it. From Aristotle's polis to Jefferson's agrarian ideal, the civic conception of freedom found its home in small and bounded places, largely self-sufficient, inhabited by people whose conditions of life afforded the leisure, learning, and commonality to deliberate well about public concerns. But we do not live that way today. To the contrary, we live in a highly mobile continental society, teeming with diversity. Moreover, even this vast society is not self-sufficient but is situated in a global economy whose frenzied flow of money and goods, information and images, pays little heed to nations, much less neighborhoods. How, under conditions such as these, could the civic strand of freedom possibly take hold?

In fact, this objection continues, the republican strand of American politics, for all its persistence, has often spoken in a voice tinged with nostalgia. Even as Jefferson exalted the yeoman farmer, America was becoming a manufacturing nation. And so it was with the artisan republicans of Andrew Jackson's day, the apostles of free labor in Abraham Lin-

coln's time, and the shopkeepers and pharmacists Brandeis defended against the curse of bigness. In each of these cases—or so it is argued—republican ideals found their expression at the last moment, too late to offer feasible alternatives, just in time to offer an elegy for a lost cause. If the republican tradition is irredeemably nostalgic, then whatever its capacity to illuminate the defects of liberal politics, it offers little that could lead us to a richer civic life.

The second objection holds that even were it possible to recover republican ideals, to do so would not be desirable; given the difficulty of instilling civic virtue, republican politics always runs the risk of coercion. This peril can be glimpsed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account of the formative undertaking necessary to a democratic republic. The task of the republic's founder or great legislator, he writes, is no less than "to change human nature, to transform each individual . . . into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being." The legislator "must deny man his own forces" in order to make him reliant on the community as a whole. The more nearly each person's individual will is "dead and obliterated," the more likely that person is to embrace the general will. "Thus if each citizen is nothing and can do nothing except in concert with all the others . . . one can say that the legislation has achieved the highest possible point of perfection."

The coercive face of soulcraft is by no means unknown among American republicans. For example, Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, wanted "to convert men into republican machines" and to teach each citizen "that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property." But civic education need not take so harsh a form. In practice, successful republican soulcraft involves a gentler kind of tutelage. For example, the political economy of citizenship that informed nineteenth-century American life sought to cultivate not only commonality but also the independence and judgment to deliberate well about the common good. It worked not by coercion but by a complex mixture of persuasion and habituation—what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the slow and quiet action of society upon itself."

The dispersed, differentiated character of American public life in Tocqueville's day and the indirect modes of character formation this differentiation allowed are what separate Rousseau's republican exertions from the civic practices Tocqueville described. Unable to abide disharmony, Rousseau's republican ideal seeks to collapse the distance between persons so that citizens stand in a kind of speechless transparency, or immediate presence to one another. Where the general will prevails, the citizens "consider themselves to be a single body" and there is no need for political argument. "The first to propose [a new law] merely says what everybody has already felt; and there is no question of intrigues or eloquence" to secure its passage.

It is this assumption, that the common good is unitary and uncontested, not the formative ambition as such, that in-

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clines Rousseau's politics to coercion. It is, moreover, an assumption that republican politics can do without. As America's experience with the political economy of citizenship suggests, the civic conception of freedom does not render disagreement unnecessary. It offers a way of conducting political argument, not transcending it.

Unlike Rousseau's unitary vision, the republican politics Tocqueville described is more clamorous than consensual. It does not despise differentiation. Instead of collapsing the space between persons, it fills this space with public institutions that gather people together in various capacities, that both separate and relate them. These institutions include the townships, schools, religions, and virtue-sustaining occupations that form the "character of mind" and "habits of the heart" a democratic republic requires. Whatever their more particular purposes, these agencies of civic education inculcate the habit of attending to public things. And yet given their multiplicity, they prevent public life from dissolving into an undifferentiated whole.

So the civic strand of freedom is not necessarily coercive. It can sometimes find pluralistic expression. To this extent the liberal objection to republican political theory is misplaced. But the liberal worry does contain an insight that cannot be dismissed: republican politics is risky politics, a politics without guarantees, and the risks it entails inhere in the formative project. To accord the political community a stake in the character of its citizens is to concede the possibility that bad communities may form bad characters. Dispersed power and multiple sites of civic formation may reduce these dangers but cannot remove them.

WHERE LIBERALS FEAR TO TREAD

WHAT to make of this complaint depends on the alternatives. If there were a way to secure freedom without attending to the character of citizens, or to define rights without affirming a conception of the good life, then the liberal objection to the formative project might be decisive. But is there such a way? Liberal political theory claims that there is. The voluntarist conception of freedom promises to lay to rest, once and for all, the risks of republican politics. If liberty can be detached from the exercise of

self-government and conceived instead as the capacity of persons to choose their own ends, then the difficult task of forming civic virtue can finally be dispensed with. Or at least it can be narrowed to the seemingly simpler task of cultivating toleration and respect for others.

In the voluntarist conception of freedom, statecraft no longer needs soulcraft, except in a limited domain. Tying freedom to respect for the rights of freely choosing selves dampens old disputes about how to form the habits of self-rule. It spares politics the ancient quarrels about the nature of the good life. Once freedom is detached from the formative project, "the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils," in Kant's memorable words. "For such a task does not involve the moral improvement of man."

But the liberal attempt to detach freedom from the formative project confronts problems of its own, problems that can be seen in both the theory and the practice of the procedural republic. The philosophical difficulty lies in the liberal conception of citizens as freely choosing, independent selves, unencumbered by moral or civic ties antecedent to choice. This vision cannot account for a wide range of moral and political obligations that we commonly recognize, such as obligations of loyalty or solidarity. By insisting that we are bound only by ends and roles we choose for ourselves, it denies that we can ever be claimed by ends we have not chosen—ends given by nature or God, for example, or by our identities as members of families, peoples, cultures, or traditions.

Some liberals concede that we may be bound by obligations such as these but insist that they apply to private life alone and have no bearing on politics. But this raises a further difficulty. Why insist on separating our identity as citizens from our identity as persons more broadly conceived? Why should political deliberation not reflect our best understanding of the highest human ends? Don't arguments about justice and rights unavoidably draw on particular conceptions of the good life, whether we admit it or not?

The problems in the theory of procedural liberalism show up in the practice it inspires. A politics that brackets morality and religion too completely soon generates its own disenchantment. Where political discourse lacks moral resonance, the yearning for a public life of larger meaning finds undesirable expression. The Christian Coalition and similar groups seek to clothe the naked public square with narrow, intolerant

moralisms. Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread. The disenchantment also assumes more secular forms. Absent a political agenda that addresses the moral dimension of public questions, attention becomes riveted on the private vices of public officials. Political discourse becomes increasingly preoccupied with the scandalous, the sensational, and the confessional as purveyed by tabloids, talk shows, and eventually the mainstream media as well. It cannot be said that the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism is wholly responsible for these tendencies. But liberalism's vision of political discourse is too spare to contain the moral energies of democratic life. It creates a moral void that opens the way for intolerance and other misguided moralisms.

A political agenda lacking substantive moral discourse is one symptom of the public philosophy of the procedural republic. Another is a loss of mastery. The triumph of the voluntarist conception of freedom has coincided with a growing sense of disempowerment. Despite the expansion of rights in recent decades, Americans find to their frustration that they are losing control of the forces that govern their lives. This has partly to do with the insecurity of jobs in the global economy, but it also reflects the self-image by which we live. The liberal self-image and the actual organization of modern social and economic life are sharply at odds. Even as we think and act as freely choosing, independent selves, we confront a world governed by impersonal structures of power that defy our understanding and control. The voluntarist conception of freedom leaves us ill equipped to contend with this condition. Liberated though we may be from the burden of identities we have not chosen, entitled though we may be to the range of rights assured by the welfare state, we find ourselves overwhelmed as we turn to face the world on our own resources.

GLOBAL POLITICS AND PARTICULAR IDENTITIES

IF the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism fails to address democracy's discontent, the question remains how a renewed attention to republican themes might better equip us to contend with our condition. Is self-government in the republican sense even possible under modern conditions, and if so, what qualities of character would be necessary to sustain it?

A partial, inchoate answer can be glimpsed in the shifting terms of contemporary political argument. Some conservatives, and recently some liberals, have gestured toward a revival of civic virtue, character formation, and moral judgment as considerations in public policy and political discourse. From the 1930s to the 1980s conservatives criticized the welfare state on libertarian grounds. Since the mid-1980s, however, the conservative argument has focused on the moral and civic consequences of federal social policy. Welfare is at odds with freedom, many conservatives now argue, not because it coerces taxpayers but because it breeds dependence

and irresponsibility among recipients and so deprives them of the independence that full citizenship requires.

Liberals came more reluctantly to the revolt against the procedural republic, but they too have begun to articulate civic themes. In November of 1993, speaking in the Memphis church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached the night before his assassination, Bill Clinton ventured onto moral and spiritual terrain that liberals of recent times had sought to avoid. Restoring work to the life of the inner city was essential, he explained, not only for the income it would bring but also for its character-forming effects, for the discipline, structure, and pride that work confers on family life.

But suppose that the civic intimations present in our politics did find fuller voice and succeeded in reorienting the terms of political discourse. What is the prospect that a revitalized politics could actually alleviate the loss of mastery and the erosion of community that lie at the heart of democracy's discontent? Even a politics that engaged rather than avoided substantive moral discourse and managed to revive the formative project would confront a daunting obstacle. This obstacle consists in the formidable scale on which modern economic life is organized and the difficulty of achieving the democratic political authority necessary to govern it.

The difficulty actually involves two related challenges. One is to devise political institutions capable of governing the global economy. The other is to cultivate the civic identities necessary to sustain those institutions, to supply them with the moral authority they require. It is not obvious that both these challenges can be met.

In a world where capital and goods, information and images, pollution and people, flow across national boundaries with unprecedented ease, politics must assume transnational, even global, forms, if only to keep up. Otherwise, economic power will go unchecked by democratically sanctioned political power. Nation-states, traditionally the vehicles of self-government, will find themselves increasingly unable to bring their citizens' judgments to bear on the economic forces that govern their destinies. If the global character of the economy suggests the need for transnational forms of governance, however, it remains to be seen whether such political units can inspire the identification and allegiance—the moral and civic culture—on which democratic authority ultimately depends.

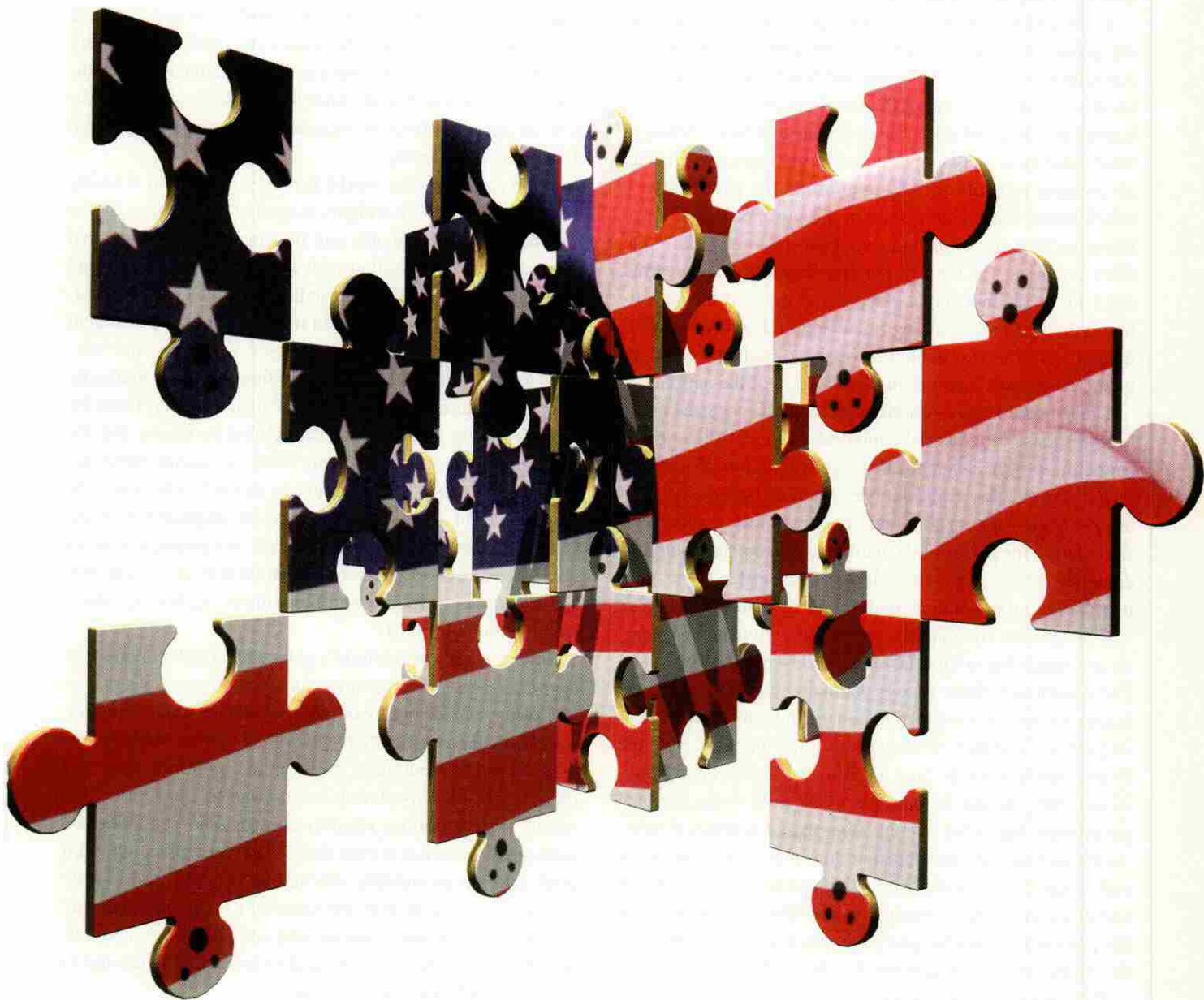
In striking ways, the challenge to self-government in the global economy resembles the predicament American politics faced in the early decades of the twentieth century. Then as now, new forms of commerce and communication spilled across familiar political boundaries and created networks of interdependence among people in distant places. But the new interdependence did not carry with it a new sense of community. Jane Addams's insight, that "the mere mechanical fact of interdependence amounts to nothing," is no less apt today. What railroads, telegraph wires, and national markets were to her time, satellite hookups, CNN, cyberspace, and global markets are to ours—instruments that link people

without necessarily making them neighbors or fellow citizens or participants in a common venture.

Given the similarity between their predicament and ours, it is tempting to think that the logic of the Progressives' solution can be extended to our time. If the way to respond to a national economy was to strengthen the national government and cultivate a sense of national citizenship, perhaps the way to respond to a global economy is to strengthen

global neighborhood based on economic exchange and improved communications into a universal moral community."

The analogy between the globalizing impulse of our time and the nationalizing project of the Progressives' time does hold to this extent: We cannot hope to govern the global economy without transnational political institutions, and we cannot expect to sustain such institutions without cultivating more-expansive civic identities. Human-rights conventions,



global governance and cultivate a corresponding sense of global or cosmopolitan citizenship. Internationally minded reformers have already begun to articulate this impulse. The Commission on Global Governance, a group of twenty-eight public officials from around the world, recently published a report calling for greater authority for international institutions. The commission also called for efforts to inspire "broad acceptance of a global civic ethic," to transform "a

global environmental accords, and world bodies governing trade, finance, and economic development are among the undertakings that will depend for public support on inspiring a greater sense of engagement in a shared global destiny.

But the cosmopolitan vision is wrong to suggest that we can restore self-government simply by pushing sovereignty and citizenship upward. The hope for self-government today lies not in relocating sovereignty but in dispersing it. The

most promising alternative to the sovereign state is not a cosmopolitan community based on the solidarity of humankind but a multiplicity of communities and political bodies—some more extensive than nations and some less—among which sovereignty is diffused. Only a politics that disperses sovereignty both upward and downward can combine the power required to rival global market forces with the differentiation required of a public life that hopes to inspire the allegiance of its citizens.

In some places dispersing sovereignty may entail according greater cultural and political autonomy to subnational communities—such as Catalans and Kurds, Scots and Quebecois—even while strengthening and democratizing the European Union and other transnational structures. Arrangements like these may avoid the strife that arises when state sovereignty is an all-or-nothing affair. In the United States, which never was a nation-state in the European sense, proliferating sites of political engagement may take a different form. America was born of the conviction that sovereignty need not reside in a single place. From the start the Constitution divided power among branches and levels of government. Over time, however, we, too, have pushed sovereignty and citizenship upward, in the direction of the nation.

The nationalizing of American political life occurred largely in response to industrial capitalism. The consolidation of economic power called forth the consolidation of political power. Present-day conservatives who rail against big government often ignore this fact. They wrongly assume that rolling back the power of the national government would liberate individuals to pursue their own ends, instead of leaving them at the mercy of economic forces beyond their control.

Conservative complaints about big government find popular resonance, but not for the reasons conservatives articulate. The American welfare state is politically vulnerable because it does not rest on a sense of national community adequate to its purpose. The nationalizing project that unfolded from the Progressive Era to the New Deal to the Great Society succeeded only in part. It managed to create a strong national government but failed to cultivate a shared national identity. As the welfare state developed, it drew less on an ethic of social solidarity and mutual obligation and more on an ethic of fair procedures and individual rights. But the liberalism of the procedural republic proved an inadequate substitute for the strong sense of citizenship that the welfare state requires.

If the nation cannot summon more than a minimal commonality, it is unlikely that the global community can do better, at least on its own. A more promising basis for a democratic politics that reaches beyond nations is a revitalized civic life nourished in the more particular communities we inhabit. In the age of NAFTA the politics of neighborhood matters more, not less. People will not pledge allegiance to vast and distant entities, whatever their importance, unless those institutions are somehow connected to political arrangements that reflect the identity of the participants.

BEYOND SOVEREIGN STATES AND SOVEREIGN SELVES

THE growing aspiration for the public expression of communal identities reflects a yearning for political arrangements that can situate people in a world increasingly governed by vast and distant forces. For a time the nation-state promised to answer this yearning, to provide the link between identity and self-rule. In theory at least, each state was a more or less self-sufficient political and economic unit that gave expression to the collective identity of a people defined by a common history, language, or tradition. The nation-state laid claim to the allegiance of its citizens on the ground that its exercise of sovereignty expressed their collective identity.

In the contemporary world, however, this claim is losing its force. National sovereignty is eroded from above by the mobility of capital, goods, and information across national boundaries, the integration of world financial markets, and the transnational character of industrial production. And national sovereignty is challenged from below by the resurgent aspirations of subnational groups for autonomy and self-rule. As their effective sovereignty fades, nations gradually lose their hold on the allegiance of their citizens. Beset by the integrating tendencies of the global economy and the fragmenting tendencies of group identities, nation-states are increasingly unable to link identity and self-rule. Even the most powerful states cannot escape the imperatives of the global economy; even the smallest are too heterogeneous to give full expression to the communal identity of any one ethnic or national or religious group without oppressing others who live in their midst.

Since the days of Aristotle's polis, the republican tradition has viewed self-government as an activity rooted in a particular place, carried out by citizens loyal to that place and the way of life it embodies. Self-government today, however, requires a politics that plays itself out in a multiplicity of settings, from neighborhoods to nations to the world as a whole. Such a politics requires citizens who can abide the ambiguity associated with divided sovereignty, who can think and act as multiply situated selves. The civic virtue distinctive to our time is the capacity to negotiate our way among the sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting obligations that claim us, and to live with the tension to which multiple loyalties give rise.

The global media and markets that shape our lives beckon us to a world beyond boundaries and belonging. But the civic resources we need to master these forces, or at least to contend with them, are still to be found in the places and stories, memories and meanings, incidents and identities, that situate us in the world and give our lives their moral particularity. The task for politics now is to cultivate these resources, to repair the civic life on which democracy depends. ♣

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