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Economics and Virtue in the Early Republic

As we have seen, the public philosophy of the procedural republic finds powerful expression in contemporary constitutional law. In the decades since World War II, the Supreme Court has come to insist that government be neutral among competing conceptions of the good life. But what about American public life beyond its constitutional aspect? Does the version of liberalism that conceives the right as prior to the good describe our political practice beyond the judicial realm, or is it characteristic of legal and constitutional discourse alone?

It might seem that the Court's tendency to bracket competing conceptions of the good life simply reflects its distinctive role in a constitutional democracy. While democratic politics is free to traffic in conceptions of the good—whether in aggregating individual interests or in deliberating about the good of the whole—courts must constrain what majorities can decide, and so insist on the priority of right. Given this institutional division of labor, we might expect our political discourse to partake of the moral arguments that constitutional discourse seeks to bracket.

The increased role of government since World War II offers a further reason to expect our national political life to address rather than avoid our conflicting moral conceptions. The state's active intervention in the market economy would seem to defy the aspiration to neutrality, and require government unavoidably to confront the competing purposes and ends its citizens espouse.

But these appearances are misleading. The version of liberalism that has recently emerged in constitutional law also finds expression in American political discourse generally. Despite the prominent role of government in the modern economy, there is an important sense in which this role reflects the version of liberalism that holds that government should be neutral among competing conceptions of the good life, in order to respect persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their ends for themselves. Not only is the public philosophy of the procedural republic consistent with the activist state; it illuminates the distinctive way this state has developed in the United States since the New Deal, and provides the terms of its justification.

Prosperity, Fairness, and Civic Virtue

Consider the way we think and argue about economics today, by contrast with the way Americans debated economic policy through much of our history. In contemporary American politics, 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 contribute to economic growth or improve the distribution of income; they claim that their policy 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 distribution of the national product. Throughout much of American history they have also addressed a different question, namely, what economic arrangements are most hospitable to self-government? Along with prosperity and fairness, the civic consequences of economic policy have often loomed large in American political discourse.

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 makes for virtuous citizens, well suited to self-gov-

ernment. "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God," the embodiments of "genuine virtue." The political economists of Europe may claim that every nation should manufacture for itself, but large-scale manufacturing undermines 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 bring; better to import manufactured goods than the manners and habits that attend 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. 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."[1]

Whether to encourage domestic manufactures or 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 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 1784 the Virginia legislature passed a law known as the "Port Bill," designed to centralize commerce by restricting all foreign trade to five coastal towns. The bill's advocates, including James Madison, sought to break Britain's monopoly on trade and to improve the collection of duties. By the time of the Revolution, British merchants had come to dominate the scattered wharves of Virginia's waterways. Madison hoped that a centralized system would promote economic independence by giving other nations equal access to Virginia's commerce.[2]

The Port Bill met with strong opposition, not least from the counties that lost trade under the law. Urging repeal, the opponents offered three different arguments—one about fairness, one about prosperity, and one about civic virtue. The argument from fairness denounced the bill as "unjust and unequal," since it failed to divide wealth and power equally among the various districts and towns. The argument from prosperity

held that any gains from centralized commerce would be outweighed by the costs of transporting goods to and from the central ports.[3]

George Mason, the leading opponent of the bill, offered a further consideration. He argued that large commercial cities would undermine the civic virtue that republican government requires. "If virtue is the vital principle of a republic, and it cannot long exist, without frugality, probity and strictness of morals," Mason asked, "will the manners of populous commercial cities be favorable to the principles of our free government? Or will not the vice, the depravity of morals, the luxury, venality, and corruption, which invariably prevail in great commercial cities, be utterly subversive of them?" Virginia's Port Bill narrowly survived the repeal efforts, but it was soon overridden by a new Constitution that transferred to the federal government the regulation of foreign trade.[4]

Mason's case against the Port Bill, like Jefferson's argument against large-scale manufactures, reflected a way of thinking about politics that had its roots in the classical republican tradition. Central to republican theory is the idea that liberty requires self-government, which depends in turn on civic virtue. This idea figured prominently in the political outlook of the founding generation. "[P]ublic virtue is the only foundation of republics," wrote John Adams on the eve of independence. "There must be a positive passion for the public good, the public interest, honour, power and glory, established in the minds of the people, or there can be no republican government, nor any real liberty."[5] Benjamin Franklin agreed: "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters."[6]

The founders also learned from the republican tradition that they could not take civic virtue for granted. To the contrary, public spirit was a fragile thing, susceptible of erosion by such corrupting forces as luxury, wealth, and power. Anxiety over the loss of civic virtue was a persistent republican theme. "Virtue and simplicity of manners are indispensably necessary in a republic among all orders and degrees of men," wrote John Adams. "But there is so much rascality, so much venality and corruption, so much avarice and ambition, such a rage for profit and commerce among all ranks and degrees of men even in America, that I sometimes doubt whether there is public virtue enough to support a republic."[7]

If liberty cannot survive without virtue, and if virtue tends always to corruption, then the challenge for republican politics is to form or reform the moral character of citizens, to strengthen their attachment to the common good. The public life of a republic must serve a formative role, aimed at cultivating citizens of a certain kind. "[I]t is the part of a great politician to make the character of his people," Adams declared, "to extinguish among them the follies and vices that he sees, and to create in them the virtues and abilities which he sees wanting."[8] Republican government cannot be neutral toward the moral character of its citizens or the ends they pursue. Rather, it must undertake to form their character and ends in order to foster the public concerns on which liberty depends.

The Revolution was itself born of anxiety about the loss of civic virtue, as a desperate attempt to stave off corruption and to realize republican ideals.[9] In the 1760s and 1770s the American colonists viewed their struggle with England in republican terms. The English constitution was imperiled by ministerial manipulation of Parliament, and, worse, the English people had become "too corrupted, too enfeebled, to restore their constitution to its first principles and rejuvenate their country."[10] In the decade following the Stamp Act, attempts by Parliament to exercise sovereignty in America appeared to the colonists a "conspiracy of power against liberty," a small part of a larger assault on the English constitution itself. It was this belief "above all else that in the end propelled [the colonists] into Revolution."[11]

Republican assumptions did more than animate colonial fears; they also defined the Revolution's aims. "The sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution. . . . No phrase except 'liberty' was invoked more often by the Revolutionaries than 'the public good,'" which for them meant more than the sum of individual interests. The point of politics was not to broker competing interests but to transcend them, to seek the good of the community as a whole. More than a break with England, independence would be a source of moral regeneration; it would stave off corruption and renew the moral spirit that suited Americans to republican government.[12]

Such ambitious hopes were bound to meet with disappointment, as they did in the years immediately following independence. When the

Revolution failed to produce the moral reformation its leaders had hoped for, new fears arose for the fate of republican government. During the "critical period" of the 1780s, leading politicians and writers worried that the public spirit inspired by the struggle with Britain had given way to the rampant pursuit of luxury and self-interest. "What astonishing changes a few years are capable of producing," said George Washington in 1786. "From the high ground we stood upon, from the plain path which invited our footsteps, to be so fallen, so lost! It is really mortifying."[13]

Civic Virtue and the Constitution

What troubled the revolutionary leaders most of all was the popular politics increasingly practiced in the state legislatures. They had assumed that under republican government, a "natural aristocracy" of merit and virtue would replace an artificial aristocracy of heredity and patronage. But in the postrevolutionary state legislatures, the best did not necessarily rule. Ordinary, uneducated citizens—small-town shopkeepers, artisans, subsistence farmers—passed laws confiscating property, granting debtor relief, and enacting paper money schemes. For republican leaders such as Madison, this form of politics amounted to an excess of democracy, a perversion of republican ideals. Rather than governing in a disinterested spirit on behalf of the public good, these representatives of the people were all too representative—parochial, small-minded, and eager to serve the private interests of their constituents.[14]

By the standards of a later day, the politics of the 1780s might simply appear as the emergence of a now familiar interest-group pluralism. To the founding generation, however, it was a kind of corruption, a falling away from civic virtue. The Revolution "had unleashed acquisitive and commercial forces" the founders had not anticipated: "in states up and down the continent, various narrow factional interests, especially economic, were flourishing as never before" and gaining protection from the democratically elected state legislatures.[15] Madison despaired at the "mutability" and "injustice" of state laws, which he attributed to the interest-ridden character of local politics: "Is it to be imagined that an ordinary citizen or even Assemblyman of Rhode Island in estimating the policy of

paper money, ever considered or cared, in what light the measure would be viewed in France or Holland; or even in Massachusetts or Connecticut? It was a sufficient temptation to both that it was for their interest."[16]

Growing doubts about the prospect of civic virtue in the 1780s prompted two kinds of response—one formative, the other procedural. The first sought, through education and other means, to inculcate virtue more strenuously. The second sought, through constitutional change, to render virtue less necessary.

Benjamin Rush gave stark expression to the formative impulse in his proposal for public schools in Pennsylvania. Writing in 1786, he declared that the mode of education proper to a republic was one that inculcated an overriding allegiance to the common good: "Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it." With a proper system of public education, Rush maintained, it would be "possible to convert men into republican machines. This must be done if we expect them to perform their parts properly in the great machine of the government of the state."[17]

The most eventful procedural response to republican worries about the dearth of civic virtue was the Constitution of 1787. More than mere remedy to the defects of the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution had as its larger ambition "to save American republicanism from the deadly effects of [the] private pursuits of happiness," from the acquisitive preoccupations that so absorbed Americans and distracted them from the public good.[18]

Prompted though it was by fear for the loss of civic virtue, the Constitution did not seek to elevate the moral character of the people, at least not directly. Instead, it sought institutional devices that would save republican government by making it less dependent on the virtue of the people.

By the time they assembled in Philadelphia, the framers had concluded that civic virtue was too much to expect of most of the people most of the time. Several years earlier, Alexander Hamilton had ridiculed the republican hope that virtue could prevail over self-interest among ordinary citizens: "We may preach till we are tired of the theme, the necessity of disinterestedness in republics, without making a single proselyte. The

virtuous declaimer will neither persuade himself nor any other person to be content with a double mess of porridge, instead of a reasonable stipend for his services. We might as soon reconcile ourselves to the Spartan community of goods and wives, to their iron coin, their long beards, or their black broth." The republican models of Greece and Rome were no more appropriate to America, Hamilton thought, than the examples of the Hottentots and Laplanders. Noah Webster, a leading defender of the Constitution, agreed: "Virtue, patriotism, or love of country, never was and never will be, till men's natures are changed, a fixed, permanent principle and support of government."[19]

In *Federalist* no. 51 Madison explained how, contrary to classical teachings, republican government could make its peace with interest and ambition after all. Liberty would depend not on civic virtue but instead on a scheme of mechanisms and procedures by which competing interests would check and balance one another: "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."[20] According to Madison, the Constitution would compensate for "the defect of better motives" by institutional devices that would counterpose "opposite and rival interests." The separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the division of power between federal and state governments, the division of Congress into two bodies with different terms and constituencies, and the indirect election of the Senate were among the "inventions of prudence" designed to secure liberty without relying too heavily on the virtue of citizens. "A dependence on the people is no doubt the primary control on the government," Madison allowed, "but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."[21]

Despite their revision of classical republican assumptions, the framers of the Constitution adhered to republican ideals in two important respects. First, they continued to believe that the virtuous should govern, and that government should aim at a public good beyond the sum of

private interests. Second, they did not abandon the formative ambition of republican politics, the notion that government has a stake in cultivating citizens of a certain kind.

The framers rejected the notion that the people possessed sufficient virtue to govern directly. But they retained the hope that the national government they had designed would be led by enlightened statesmen like themselves, who would possess the virtue and wisdom that ordinary citizens and local representatives lacked.[22] Such "individuals of extended views, and of national pride" would not cater to parochial interests but would govern with the disinterest of classical republican legislators, "with a sole regard to justice and the public good."[23]

The point of the system of representation they invented was to identify such people and to place them in positions of power and trust. The aim was to design a system that would, in Madison's words, "extract from the mass of the society the purest and noblest characters which it contains," people "whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments [would] render them superior to local prejudices, and to schemes of injustice."[24]

This aim distances Madison from modern-day interest-group pluralists who invoke his name. For Madison, the reason for admitting interests into the system was not to govern by them but to disempower them, to play them to a draw, so that disinterested statesmen might govern unhindered by them. The reason for taking in, through an extended republic, "a greater variety of parties and interests" was not to better approximate the will of the people; it was to increase the likelihood that these various interests would cancel each other out, and so enable enlightened statesmen to rise above them.[25]

For Madison, the point of republican government was not to give the people what they want, but to do the right thing. This meant placing government in the hands of "a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations." The result, he thought, would be better than could be achieved by consulting the people directly. If the virtuous govern, "it may well happen that the public voice pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good, than if pronounced by the people themselves convened for the purpose."[26]

Even Hamilton, who expected little virtue from the people at large, was no apologist for a politics of self-interest. In line with the classical republican tradition, he considered civic life a nobler calling than commercial pursuits, and celebrated the ideal of the legislator motivated not by material gain but by honor and glory. "The station of a member of Congress," Hamilton wrote, "is the most illustrious and important of any I am able to conceive. He is to be regarded not only as a legislator, but as the founder of an empire. A man of virtue and ability, dignified with so precious a trust . . . would esteem it not more the duty, than the privilege and ornament of his office, to do good to mankind; from this commanding eminence, he would look down with contempt upon every mean or interested pursuit."[27] Ordinary men were moved by self-interest, but the "love of fame" was "the ruling passion of the noblest minds." This higher motive, "which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit," was the passion of founders.[28]

The second strand of the republican tradition the framers retained was its formative ambition. Although the Constitution limited the role of ordinary citizens in governing, it did not abandon the notion that government should shape the moral character of its citizens. If republican government aimed at something higher than the sum of private interests, then no democratic republic, however carefully designed to limit popular participation, could afford to ignore the character of its people.

Even Madison, the principal architect of the mechanisms designed to "refine and enlarge the public views,"[29] affirmed that virtue among the people was indispensable to self-government. At the very least, he told the Virginia ratifying convention, the people need the virtue and intelligence to elect virtuous representatives. "Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government, can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea."[30] In his Farewell Address, George Washington echoed the familiar republican view: "Virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."[31]

Hamilton also assigned government a formative role, although the quality he hoped to cultivate was not traditional civic virtue but attachment to the nation. In *Federalist* no. 27 he argued that the new national

government would establish its authority only if it came to infuse the lives and sentiments of the people: "the more the citizens are accustomed to meet with it in the common occurrences of their political life; the more it is familiarised to their sight and to their feelings; the further it enters into those objects which touch the most sensible cords, and put in motion the most active springs of the human heart; the greater will be the probability that it will conciliate the respect and attachment of the community." For Hamilton, the national government depended for its success on its capacity to shape the habits of the people, to interest their sensations, to win their affection, to "[circulate] through those channels and currents, in which the passions of mankind naturally flow."[32]

Although the framers believed that republican government required a certain kind of citizen, they did not view the Constitution as the primary instrument of moral or civic improvement. For the formative dimension of public life, they looked elsewhere—to education, to religion, and, more broadly, to the social and economic arrangements that would define the character of the new nation.

Federalists versus Jeffersonians

After ratification, American political debate turned from constitutional questions to economic ones. But the economic debate that unfolded was not only about national wealth and distributive justice; it was also about the civic consequences of economic arrangements—about the kind of society America should become and the kind of citizens it should cultivate.[33]

Two major issues illustrate the prominence of civic considerations in the political discourse of the early republic. One was the debate over Hamilton's treasury system, the debate that gave rise to the division between Federalists and Republicans. The second was the debate over whether to encourage domestic manufactures, a debate that cut across party lines.

Hamilton's Treasury System

As the first secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton made proposals to Congress on public credit, a national bank, a mint, and manufacturing.

Though all but the last were adopted, the proposals sparked much controversy and, taken as a whole, led opponents to conclude that Hamilton sought to undermine republican government. His program for government finance proved especially contentious, and raised fears that Hamilton planned to create in America a political economy like Britain's, based on patronage, influence, and connections. In his *Report on Public Credit* (1790) he proposed that the federal government assume the revolutionary debts of the states and combine them with existing federal debts. Rather than pay off the consolidated debt, Hamilton proposed to fund it through the sale of securities to investors, using revenues from duties and excise taxes to pay regular interest.[34]

Hamilton offered various economic arguments in support of his funding plan—that it would establish the nation's credit, create a money supply, provide a source for investment, and so create the basis for prosperity and wealth. But beyond these economic considerations, Hamilton sought an equally important political aim—to build support for the new national government by giving a wealthy and influential class of investors a financial stake in it.

Fearful that local sentiments would erode national authority and doubtful that disinterested virtue could inspire allegiance to the nation, Hamilton saw in public finance an instrument of nation-building: "If all the public creditors receive their dues from one source, their interest will be the same. And having the same interests, they will unite in support of the fiscal arrangements of the government." If state and federal debts were financed separately, he argued, "there will be distinct interests, drawing different ways. That union and concert of views, among the creditors . . . will be likely to give place to mutual jealousy and opposition."[35]

By regular payments on a national debt, the national government would "interweave itself into the monied interest of every state" and "insinuate itself into every branch of industry," thereby winning the support of an important class of society.[36] The political purpose of Hamilton's funding plan was no hidden agenda, but an explicit rationale for the policy. As a sympathetic newspaper commented at the time, "a national debt attaches many citizens to the government who, by their numbers, wealth, and influence, contribute more perhaps to its preservation than a body of soldiers."[37]

It was the political ambition of Hamilton's policy that sparked the most heated controversy. What Hamilton considered nation-building, others considered a kind of bribery and corruption. To a generation of Americans acutely suspicious of executive power, Hamilton's funding plan seemed an assault on republican government. It recalled the practice of the eighteenth century British prime minister Robert Walpole, who placed paid government agents in Parliament to support government policies. Although Hamilton did not propose to hire members of Congress, the fact that creditors of the government sat in Congress and supported Hamilton's financial program struck opponents as similarly corrupt. Such creditors would not be disinterested seekers of the public good, but interested partisans of the administration and the policy that secured their investments.[38]

Republican fears of a conspiracy of power against liberty had fueled the Revolution. Now Hamilton seemed to be recreating in America the English system of government finance so despised by republicans for its reliance on patronage, connections, and speculation. Hamilton acknowledged what his opponents feared, that his model was Britain. In an after-dinner conversation with Adams and Jefferson, he even defended its reliance on patronage and corruption. Adams observed that, purged of its corruption, the British constitution would be the most perfect devised by the wit of man. Hamilton replied, "purge it of its corruption, and give to its popular branch equality of representation, and it would become an *impracticable* government. As it stands at present, with all its supposed defects, it is the most perfect government which ever existed." Jefferson, appalled, concluded that "Hamilton was not only a monarchist, but for a monarchy bottomed on corruption."[39]

The opponents of Hamiltonian finance advanced two different arguments against it. One concerned its distributive consequences, the other its civic consequences. The distributive argument objected to the fact that, under Hamilton's plan, the wealthy would gain at the expense of ordinary Americans. Speculators who had bought revolutionary bonds from their original owners at a fraction of their value now stood to reap huge profits, with interest to be paid from excise taxes borne by ordinary citizens.

As it figured in political debate of the 1790s, however, this distributive worry was secondary to a broader political objection. The argument that

brought the Republican party into being was that Hamilton's political economy would corrupt the morality of citizens and undermine the social conditions essential to republican government. When Republicans objected that Hamilton's system would deepen inequality in American society, they were less concerned with distributive justice as such than with the need to avoid the wide disparities of wealth that threatened republican government. Civic virtue required the capacity for independent, disinterested judgment. But poverty bred dependence, and great wealth traditionally bred luxury and distraction from public concerns.[40]

Writing to President Washington in 1792, Jefferson emphasized these moral and civic considerations. Hamilton's financial system, he complained, encouraged paper speculation and "nourishes in our citizens habits of vice and idleness instead of industry and morality." It created a "corrupt squadron" in the legislature, the ultimate object of which "is to prepare the way for a change, from the present republican form of government, to that of a monarchy, of which the English constitution is to be the model."[41]

By the mid-1790s, Republican writers joined the attack. Hamilton's program created a moneyed aristocracy, corrupted the legislature, and "promoted a general depravity of morals and a great decline of republican virtue."[42] Stockholders in Congress, subservient to the Treasury, formed "a vast and formidable body united in a close phalanx by a tie of mutual interest distinct from the general interest."[43] The Republican publicist John Taylor later summarized the moral and civic critique of Federalist finance: "The manners and principles of government are objects of imitation, and influence national character . . . but what virtues for imitation appear in the aristocracy of the present age? Avarice and ambition being its whole soul, what private morals will it infuse, and what national character will it create?"[44]

Republicans in Congress opposed Hamilton's "treasury system" and its attendant corruption. They offered measures to divide the Treasury Department, abolish the national bank, repeal the excise tax, and to exclude public debtholders from Congress.[45] But they were not without an affirmative vision of their own. Even before the first party division arose, Jefferson, Madison, and other republicans had sought "to form a national political economy capable of permitting and encouraging Americans to

engage industriously in virtue-sustaining occupations."[46] If liberty depended on a virtuous, independent, property-owning citizenry, which depended in turn on a predominantly agricultural economy, the question was how to preserve the agrarian character of American society.

Republican Political Economy

In the 1780s Madison and others worried that the republican character of the American people was in danger of decay. The agrarian way of life they considered indispensable to virtue was threatened by restrictions on free trade imposed by the British mercantile system and by the growth of a propertyless class in crowded urban centers. Staving off the corruption that they feared would attend an advanced commercial and manufacturing society would require policies of two kinds: open markets for American agricultural surplus abroad, and westward expansion to preserve access to land.[47]

The states, however, could not enact these policies on their own. Only a strong national government would have sufficient power to force the dismantling of the mercantile system and confront foreign powers such as Spain that posed obstacles to westward expansion. Madison hoped that the new Constitution would create a national government capable of implementing policies he deemed necessary to securing a republican political economy.

For Madison, then, the new Constitution promised more than a procedural response to the erosion of civic virtue. For all its filtering mechanisms, checks and balances, and "auxiliary precautions," it did not abandon the formative ambition of republican government after all. In Madison's view, the Constitution would make its contribution to moral and civic improvement indirectly, by empowering the national government to shape a political economy hospitable to republican virtue.

Madison's and Hamilton's contrasting visions of civic virtue explain why these allies in defense of the Constitution parted company on matters of political economy. As soon became clear, they had different ends in mind for the national government they helped create, and for the kind of citizens they hoped to cultivate. Madison sought national power to preserve the agrarian way of life he believed republican government required.

Hamilton rejected the ideal of a virtuous agrarian republic. He sought national power to create the conditions for the advanced commercial and manufacturing economy that Jefferson and Madison considered inimical to republican government. Hamilton did not despair at the prospect of a modern commercial society, with its social inequalities and rampant pursuit of self-interest. To the contrary, he regarded these developments as inevitable conditions of the powerful and prosperous nation he hoped to build.[48]

From the standpoint of twentieth-century politics, the issue between Hamilton and his republican opponents might appear a familiar contest between economic growth on the one hand and fairness on the other. But these were not the primary terms of the debate. The arguments for and against Hamiltonian finance had less to do with prosperity and fairness than with the meaning of republican government and the kind of citizen it required.

Hamilton did believe his plan would lay the basis for economic growth, but his primary purpose was not to maximize the gross national product. For Hamilton, as for Jefferson and Madison, economics was the handmaiden of politics, not the other way around. The political vision that animated Hamilton's economics was a vision of republican glory and greatness. In the modern world, such greatness depended, he believed, on an advanced economy of commerce, manufacturing, sound currency, and public finance.

Skeptical of inspiring disinterested patriotism or virtue among the people, Hamilton sought to turn self-interest to a public good beyond mere interests, to build what he called "the future grandeur and glory of America."[49] In Hamilton's view, the classical ideal of republican glory could now only be achieved by modern expedients: "Our prevailing passions are ambition and interest; and it will ever be the duty of a wise government to avail itself of those passions, in order to make them subservient to the public good."[50] Given the prevalence of avarice and interest, the challenge for the founder of a great republic was to use those passions for higher things. Not self-interest or even the quest for power, but "the love of fame" was "the ruling passion of the noblest minds."[51]

For their part, Hamilton's opponents did complain that his policies favored the wealthy. But this distributional worry was secondary to the

more fundamental objection that Hamilton's "vision of a great republic—a commercial, manufacturing country dependent on public credit, British investment, and a sound system of public finance—necessarily threatened their contrasting ideal of a virtuous American state."[52]

These rival political economies found expression in the early debates between Federalists and Republicans. To achieve free trade for America's agriculture, Madison advocated "commercial discrimination," a policy of retaliatory duties aimed at coercing Britain to remove restrictions on American commerce. Hamilton opposed it on the grounds that coercion would not work and that America needed British commerce, credit, and capital to fund the national debt and fuel economic development, even at the price of submitting to British domination.[53] Federalists favored a national bankruptcy law to promote an advanced commercialized economy; Jeffersonians opposed it as promoting a spirit of reckless speculation and eroding the moral character of the people.[54]

When Jefferson was elected president in 1800, his goal was to reverse the "Anglicization" of American government and society. In order to purge the national government of the corruption of Hamilton's system, he sought to retire the national debt, reduce government expenditures, and repeal internal taxes. Beyond restoring republican simplicity and virtue to government, Jefferson and Madison sought, through the sixteen years of their presidencies, to secure the two conditions for a republican political economy—westward expansion and free trade. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 achieved the first; the Embargo of 1807–1809 attempted, unsuccessfully, to achieve the second. Both policies aroused debates that illustrated the civic strand of economic argument in the early republic.[55]

The Louisiana Purchase served certain economic ends that Republicans and Federalists could agree on, such as access to the Mississippi River and control of New Orleans. The issue between Republicans and Federalists concerned the vast tract of land west of the Mississippi, and the civic consequences of settling it.[56]

For Republicans, the open land promised to preserve the agricultural way of life that fostered virtuous citizens, and forestall the day when America would become a crowded, dependent, unequal society, inconsistent with republican government. "By enlarging the empire of liberty," Jefferson observed, "we multiply its auxiliaries, and provide new sources

of renovation, should its principles, at any time, degenerate, in those portions of our country which gave them birth."[57] John Taylor praised the Louisiana Purchase for its moral and civic consequences. The new territory, he wrote, would encourage "plain and regular manners," a "love of virtue and independence," and would preserve the "equality of possessions" republicanism requires.[58] For Republicans fearful of the centralizing tendency of military establishments, removing the French from Louisiana had the further advantage of distancing America from the wars and intrigues of Europe, and so avoiding the need for the armies, navies, taxes, and debt that concentrate power and threaten republican liberty.[59]

For Federalists, by contrast, the vast wilderness would "prove worse than useless."[60] Settlement of the new territory would disperse the population, increase the scourge of localism, and undermine the Federalist attempt to consolidate national power and assert its influence and control. Rapid westward emigration, Hamilton feared, "must hasten the dismemberment of a large portion of our country, or a dissolution of the Government."[61]

The Republicans were less successful in their attempt to secure the second condition of a republican political economy, a removal of restrictions on foreign trade. When in 1807 Britain prohibited all American trade with Europe that did not first pass through England, Jefferson imposed an embargo on foreign trade that lasted fourteen months. He hoped through "peaceable coercion" to force the European powers to allow free trade for American commerce. Beyond seeking independence for American trade, the embargo sought to assert and encourage the superior virtue of American republican life. The corrupt societies of Europe would not survive without American produce, while Americans could do without the luxuries and fineries of the decadent Old World. Federalist critics, whose New England merchant economies suffered most from the embargo, charged that Jefferson's true aim was to destroy American commerce and impose a primitive, precommercial social order. Some added pointedly that the ancient republic of Sparta, Jefferson's supposed ideal, depended on slaves.[62] In the end, the embargo failed to liberate American commerce, and "the Jeffersonians had to accept war as the dangerous but necessary means of furthering the Revolutionary vision of free trade."[63]

With the War of 1812, Republicans overcame their aversion to war in order to vindicate America's economic independence from Europe. Some Republicans offered a further civic consideration in support of the War of 1812: Rather than undermining republican liberty, the rigors of war might revitalize the waning civic virtue of Americans and recall them to a common good that a rapidly advancing commercial society threatened to obscure.[64]

For their part, the Federalists, now relegated to opposition, voiced their own anxieties about the moral and civic character of the people. The virtues they prized were the conservative virtues of order, deference, and restraint. In Jefferson's America, they saw these virtues slipping away.[65]

What would save America from the "turbulence and inconstancy" that brought the demise of the Roman and Athenian commonwealths? one Federalist asked; "Nothing, nothing but the virtue of our citizens can afford us a bulwark or a barrier." Federalism had depended "on the supposed existence of sufficient political virtue, and on the permanency and authority of the public morals," according to Fisher Ames. But now, Federalists were not optimistic. "We are in fact a much altered people," a Federalist lamented in 1798, "and are no more like what we were some twenty years ago, than . . . the Italians are like the Romans."[66]

The Federalists, ever uneasy about democracy, believed that popular government depended for its order and stability on the restraints imposed by religion and morality: "good laws [are those] tending to the promotion of religion, patriotism, and virtue, without which the happiness of no people can be durable." They blamed Jefferson for the democratization of American society, and especially for the weakening of established religion. "The federalists are dissatisfied," wrote Timothy Pickering, "because they see the public morals debased, by the corrupt and corrupt[ing] system of our rulers. Men are tempted to become apostates, not to federalism merely, but to virtue, and to religion, and to good government." Another Federalist charged that the effect of Jefferson's presidency was "to corrupt and demoralize the public mind. By corruption, I do not mean that he has bribed the people with money; by demoralization, I do not mean that he has made them thieves or robbers; I mean to say that he has suffered to evaporate that manly pride and spirit of independence which conducted us through the revolutionary war. . . . The people have

become impatient of governmental restraint, and have lost all reverence for established usages and the settled order of things."[67]

For all they rejected in the republican tradition, the Federalists in dissent, like the Jeffersonians they opposed, carried its formative ambition into the nineteenth century.

The Debate over Domestic Manufactures

History sometimes resolves a question so completely that it is difficult to recall the taking of sides. So it is with the question whether America should be a manufacturing nation. In the early decades of the republic, many Americans thought it should not. The arguments they advanced for remaining an agricultural nation make little sense within the now familiar terms of prosperity and distributive justice. Jefferson and his followers argued against large-scale manufactures primarily on moral and civic grounds; the agrarian way of life was most likely to produce the kind of citizens self-government requires. Like the debate over Hamilton's treasury system, the debate over whether to encourage domestic manufactures illustrates the prominence of civic considerations in the political discourse of the early republic.

The early advocates of American manufactures, like the early opponents, made their case in the name of liberty and virtue, not economic growth. When Britain sought to tax the colonies during the 1760s and 1770s, the colonists responded by refusing to import or consume British goods. By their boycotts, the colonists hoped not only to retaliate against Britain but also to affirm republican virtue, to assert economic independence, and to save themselves from the corruption of imported luxuries. The nonimportation and nonconsumption movements, with their appeal to republican simplicity and frugality, provided the first spur to domestic manufactures. "[I]f we mean still to be free," a newspaper exhorted in 1767, "let us unanimously lay aside foreign superfluities, and encourage our own manufacture."[68]

The manufactures inspired by the nonimportation movement were for the most part coarse, household commodities, such as homespun, produced to supply essential needs. The manufacture of simple household

necessities posed no threat to republican citizenship, and few Americans questioned them. Such small-scale production took place either in the home or in the workshops of artisans and craftsmen. Unlike European factory workers, these artisans controlled their skill, labor, and tools. "[L]ike the yeomen of the countryside, they had direct access to the means of production, which conferred upon them the independence that supported republican virtue." Moreover, those who produced basic necessities were not dependent on the whims of fashion for their employment, as were European workers in luxury trades.[69]

Even those who argued for manufacturing on a larger scale cast their arguments in republican terms. Benjamin Rush was the president of the short-lived United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting American Manufactures, the first large-scale attempt at textile manufacturing in the colonies. Speaking at its founding in 1775, Rush argued that domestic manufactures would promote prosperity, employ the poor, and also "erect an additional barrier against the encroachments of tyranny," by reducing America's dependence on foreigners for necessities such as food and clothing. A continuing reliance on British manufactured goods would promote luxury and vice and induce an economic dependence tantamount to slavery. "By becoming slaves, we shall lose every principle of virtue. We shall transfer unlimited obedience from our Master to a corrupted majority in the British House of Commons, and shall esteem their crimes the certificates of their divine commission to govern us."[70]

The 1780s brought the first sustained debate about domestic manufactures. After the Revolution, Americans found to their distress that political independence did not necessarily bring economic independence. Britain resumed its domination of American commerce, and foreign markets for America's agricultural surplus remained restricted. With the commercial crisis came economic depression and new calls for domestic manufactures.[71]

Many Americans objected that encouraging large-scale manufactures would make for a political economy inhospitable to republican citizenship. They feared that manufactures on a scale beyond that of the household or small workshop would create a propertyless class of impoverished workers, crowded into cities, incapable of exercising the independent judgment citizenship requires. As Jefferson wrote in his *Notes on the State*

of Virginia, "Dependance begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." Factory life breeds a "corruption of morals" not found among farmers. "While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff."[72]

In a letter to John Jay, Jefferson's civic argument was even more explicit. "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interest by the most lasting bonds." If ever the day came when there were too many farmers, Jefferson would rather Americans become sailors than manufacturers. "I consider the class of artificers as the panders of vice and the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned."[73]

Jefferson's objection was not to manufacturing as such, but to enterprises that would concentrate men and machines in cities and erode the political economy of citizenship. He drew a sharp distinction between household manufactures, which he favored, and extensive manufactures, which he opposed. Household manufactures did not pose a threat to the political economy of citizenship, for two reasons. First, dispersed in the country, they did not create the concentrated wealth and power of highly capitalized factory production in large commercial cities. Second, household manufactures did not for the most part draw on the labor of citizens, but on the labor of women and children. It left able-bodied yeomen to work the land, their independence unimpaired. Jefferson's own household manufacturing at Monticello reflected this stark distinction between citizens and those consigned to dependent status. His nail factory was operated by slave boys, his textile manufactory by women and girls.[74]

For the opponents of domestic manufactures, the importance of agrarian life to republican government was not simply the negative virtue of avoiding the degradation of crowded cities. As Noah Webster observed, it also had the positive effect of fostering distinctive civic capacities: "where people live principally by agriculture, as in America, every man is in some measure an artist—he makes a variety of utensils, rough indeed, but such as will answer his purpose—he is a husbandman in summer and a mechanic in winter—he travels about the country—he converses with a variety of professions—he reads public papers—he has access to a parish library and thus becomes acquainted with history and politics. . . . Knowledge is diffused and genius roused by the very situation of America."[75]

Not all Americans of the 1780s shared Jefferson's hostility to domestic manufactures. Such was the prominence of republican assumptions, however, that even the proponents of manufactures argued within their terms. Those who favored tariffs and other measures to encourage more extensive domestic manufacturing made their case on civic grounds, not only economic ones. They argued that a balanced economy of agriculture and manufactures would better foster virtuous, independent citizens than an agrarian economy tied to foreign commerce.

Like agrarian republicans, the proponents of domestic manufactures worried about the consequences for self-government of luxury and dependence. But they believed that foreign commerce, not domestic manufactures, was the greatest source of these dangers. For America to rely wholly on foreign trade for its manufactured goods, they argued, was to erode republican virtue in two respects. First, such reliance diminished America's independence by leaving its economy hostage to the restrictions of foreign powers. Second, the flood of British finery and luxury goods was corrupting the moral character of Americans, eroding the spirit of industry, frugality, and self-denial that had sustained the colonists in their struggle for independence. As one Fourth of July orator proclaimed in 1787, America's foreign trade "is in its very nature subversive of the spirit of pure liberty and independence, as it destroys that simplicity of manners, native manliness of soul, and equality of station, which is the spring and peculiar excellence of a free government."[76]

In the same year, Tench Coxe, a young Philadelphia businessman and leading advocate of domestic manufactures, gave the inaugural address to Pennsylvania's Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts. One reason he offered for encouraging domestic manufactures was economic, to promote "private wealth and national prosperity." Another was civic, to secure republican government by employing the idle and by weaning Americans from their corrupt dependence on European luxuries. Coxe worried about poverty less for its injustice than for its tendency to undermine civic virtue: "Extreme poverty and idleness in the citizens of a free government will ever produce vicious habits and

disobedience to the laws, and must render the people fit instruments for the dangerous purposes of ambitious men. In this light the employment of our poor in manufactures, who cannot find other honest means of a subsistence, is of the utmost consequence."[77]

Beyond cultivating habits of obedience and industry among the poor, Coxe claimed for domestic manufactures the salutary effect of reducing American's wanton consumption of foreign goods: "It behoves us to consider our untimely passion for European luxuries as a malignant and alarming symptom, threatening convulsions and dissolution to the political body." Domestic manufacture of clothing, furniture, and the like would simplify American habits and reduce the corrupting influence of foreign fashion and luxury. The ultimate benefit of domestic manufactures, Coxe concluded, was not only economic but political. They would "lead us once more into the paths of virtue by restoring frugality and industry, those potent antidotes to the vices of mankind and will give us real independence by rescuing us from the tyranny of foreign fashions, and the destructive torrent of luxury."[78]

Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures*, presented to Congress in 1791, paid less heed to republican sensibilities. It began by conceding that "the cultivation of the earth" provided a "state most favourable to the freedom and independence of the human mind," and thus had a claim to preeminence over other kinds of industry.[79] But it went on to propose, in the name of national prosperity and independence, an ambitious program of American industrial development. Unlike republican advocates of manufactures, Hamilton favored public rather than household manufactures, to be encouraged by government bounties, or subsidies. Since Hamilton envisaged production for export as well as domestic use, his program implied the production of advanced, luxury manufactures rather than the crude, simple necessities favored by republicans.

Taken together with his proposals for public finance, Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures* seemed to his opponents yet another assault on the social conditions republican government required. The notion of government subsidies for industry raised the specter of privilege, connections, and corruption that Americans had renounced in breaking with Britain.

In a newspaper article following Hamilton's *Report*, Madison restated the civic argument against large-scale manufactures: "The class of citizens

who provide at once their own food and their own raiment, may be viewed as the most truly independent and happy. They are more; they are the best basis of public liberty and the strongest bulwark of public safety. It follows, that the greater the proportion of this class to the whole society, the more free, the more independent, and the more happy must be the society itself."[80]

Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures* was never adopted, in part because of increased European demand for American produce in the 1790s. As American commerce prospered, the debate over manufactures was postponed, to be renewed during the presidencies of Jefferson and Madison.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, many Jeffersonians dropped their opposition to domestic manufactures. But even as they revised their economic policy, they retained the formative ambition of the republican tradition and continued to argue within its terms. The Jeffersonians' growing sympathy to manufactures in the early 1800s was prompted by frustration with foreign obstacles to American commerce and by worry about the spirit of avarice and speculation they associated with the merchant class of the Northeast. These tendencies threatened to undermine the conditions that suited Americans to self-government, and led many republicans to conclude that domestic manufactures and home markets would better serve the political economy of citizenship.

George Logan, a friend and ally of Jefferson, urged the promotion of American manufactures in hopes of reducing the importation of foreign luxuries and improving the character of citizens. Unlike foreign luxuries, simple domestic manufactures would foster "those plain and simple manners, and that frugal mode of living . . . best suited to our Republican form of Government."[81]

Tench Coxe, Jeffersonian though he was, went further. An advocate of more advanced, factory production, Coxe argued for a protective tariff to encourage manufactures and an expanded home market for American goods. What was the point of exporting raw materials, he asked, only "to be plundered, rejected, restricted or excluded, according to their criminal will, by foreign markets?"[82] America could move to a "new and more exalted stage of industry, and consequent refinement," Coxe maintained, without the damage to self-government that agrarian republicans feared:

"the republican system is equally adapted to every species of industry that the citizens can be honestly employed in."[83]

Jefferson himself, writing in 1805, qualified his case against manufactures of two decades earlier. His opposition had been formed with the great manufacturing cities of Europe in mind, fearing the "depravity of morals, [the] dependence and corruption" they fostered. Fortunately, American manufactures had not yet approached that debased condition. "As yet our manufacturers are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to." The abundance of land had preserved the independence of workers by giving them the option of quitting the factory and working the earth.[84]

In 1810 Henry Clay, then a young Senator from Kentucky, offered a defense of domestic manufactures characteristic of the emerging Republican view. A manufacturing system limited to supplying domestic needs would not bring the evils of Manchester and Birmingham but would, on the contrary, have favorable effects on the moral character of Americans. It would employ those who would otherwise "be either unproductive, or exposed to indolence and immorality." It would save Americans from the corrupting influence of foreign luxuries. "Dame commerce," Clay declared, "is a flirting, flippant, noisy jade, and if we are governed by her fantasies we shall never put off the muslins of India and the cloths of Europe." Finally, it would bring economic independence and national pride. "The nation that imports its clothing from abroad is but little less dependent than if it imported its bread." Domestic manufacturing, if supported by bounties and protective duties, could supply every necessary article of clothing and redeem America from reliance on foreign countries.[85]

The American Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Manufactures, a New York–based organization, issued a pamphlet urging the importance of manufactures on civic as well as economic grounds. Its 1817 *Address . . . to the People of the United States* argued that in America manufacturing would elevate rather than erode the moral character of the people. American factories would not be situated in choking cities, "but rather on chosen sites, by the fall of waters and the running stream, the seats of health and cheerfulness, where good instruction will

secure the morals of the young, and good regulations will promote, in all, order, cleanliness, and the exercise of the civil duties."[86]

Late in life, after the failed embargo and the War of 1812 convinced him of the difficulty of achieving free trade, Jefferson allowed that manufacturing had become necessary to national independence. "We must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturist," he concluded in 1816. Given persistent restrictions on American commerce, those who would oppose domestic manufactures "must be for reducing us either to dependence on that foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins, and to live like wild beasts in dens and caverns. I am not one of these; experience has taught me that manufactures are now as necessary to our independence as to our comfort."[87]

The early 1800s thus brought a shift in Jeffersonian political economy, away from an agrarian economy linked to foreign commerce, and toward the development of domestic manufactures and a home market. This shift was inspired partly by frustration with persistent obstacles to foreign trade, and partly by fear that excessive foreign imports were corrupting republican virtue by making Americans dependent on foreign luxuries and fashion. This shift in economic outlook was embraced most enthusiastically by a younger, more entrepreneurial generation of republicans.

Even as republican political economy eased and then abandoned its opposition to domestic manufactures, however, it retained its civic concerns. The debate over domestic manufactures in the early nineteenth century was not only about prosperity, but also about what economic arrangements were most suitable to self-government. The republican advocates of manufactures in the early 1800s did not renounce the political economy of citizenship that had informed Jefferson's agrarian vision; they argued instead that republican citizenship would now best be advanced by a political economy in which domestic manufactures would free the nation from excessive dependence on foreign luxuries and promote the industry, frugality, and independence self-government requires.

The very events that prompted growing republican support for domestic manufactures—notably the embargo of 1807–1809 and the War of 1812—led some Federalists to fear the destruction of American commerce and to denounce the prospect of large-scale manufacturing. They too employed the language of civic virtue. Some paradoxically accused

Jefferson and Madison of promoting an advanced manufacturing society that republicans had long opposed. A Connecticut Federalist complained that Jefferson's policies would exchange a simple society of agriculture and commerce "for the dissipated and effeminate manners and habits, which extensive establishments of manufactures, never fail to bring in their train."[88] A Boston writer asked, "Would the existence of our present form of government be compatible with such a populace as exists in Lyons, Manchester, or Birmingham?"[89] The Maryland Federalist Philip Barton Key praised the superior civic virtue that agrarian life fostered: "You would never look at men and boys in workshops for that virtue and spirit in defense that you would justly expect from the yeomanry of the country."[90]

In 1814 Daniel Webster, a New Hampshire congressman who would later move to Boston and become a leading defender of manufacturing, argued in moral and civic terms against tariffs that encouraged extensive manufactures: "Habits favorable to good morals and free Governments, are not usually most successfully cultivated in populous manufacturing cities." The extensive division of labor imposed by large factories "render[s] the laborer altogether dependent on his employer." In a fervid paean to pastoral life, the young Webster warned of the day when most Americans would have to "immerse themselves in close and unwholesome work-shops; when they shall be obliged to shut their ears to the bleatings of their own flocks, upon their own hills, and to the voice of the lark that cheers them at the plough, that they may open them in dust, and smoke, and steam, to the perpetual whirl of spools and spindles, and the grating of rasps and saws."[91]

Factory Life and Republican Ideals

More than a matter of political debate, the moral and civic consequences of manufactures also figured in the design of the first manufacturing towns. The entrepreneurs who established the nation's early factories were keenly aware of republican fears. They were determined to show that American manufacturing could avoid the evils of European factory

life. Rather than breed poverty and vice, it could foster the virtues republican citizenship required.

Lowell, Massachusetts, the leading industrial town of the Jacksonian era, was widely seen as a practical test of the republican case for large-scale manufacturing. As Henry Clay observed, "Lowell will tell whether the manufacturing system is compatible with the social virtues."[92] Founded by a group of Boston merchants led by Francis Cabot Lowell, the textile factory at Lowell was carefully designed to protect the moral character of its workers. As one of Lowell's associates explained, "The operatives in the manufacturing cities of Europe, were notoriously of the lowest character, for intelligence and morals. The question therefore arose, and was deeply considered, whether this degradation was the result of the peculiar occupation, or of other and distinct causes."[93]

Lowell's founders concluded that factory work was not intrinsically inimical to moral character, and undertook several measures to assure that Lowell's workers would not suffer the moral and civic degradation of their European counterparts. First, like other American factories, the one at Lowell was operated by water power rather than steam, allowing it to be located in the country rather than in a crowded city. Second, to avoid creating an entrenched proletariat, the Lowell work force would be drawn from a rotating, not a permanent population. Ideal for this purpose were unmarried young women from the New England countryside, for whom factory work would be an interlude in life, not a career.

Finally, in an effort to prove that factory life need not be corrupting, the founders of Lowell undertook to uplift the moral character of their workers. In doing so, they displayed the paternalist tendencies to which some versions of the formative project are prone. Lowell's "factory girls" lived in company boardinghouses supervised by matrons who enforced a strict code of moral and religious conduct. In the few hours remaining to them after a seventy-hour work week, they attended religious services, borrowed books from a lending library, attended lectures, organized "improvement circles," and produced literary magazines such as the *Lowell Offering*, whose writers "offered impressive support for the Lowell system as a model republican community."[94]

The formative aspect of Lowell factory life addressed the republican worry that manufacturing workers would lack the moral character of

those who worked the land. From the standpoint of the owners, it had the further advantage of aiding recruitment by assuring workers—and their parents—of a wholesome moral environment. It also enabled the owners to instill and enforce the rigorous discipline the new factory system required.[95]

Lowell's promoters hailed their town as a model republican community. Henry Miles, a Lowell minister, praised its "strict system of moral police."[96] Edward Everett, Lowell's congressman, proclaimed manufacturing towns like Lowell "a peculiar triumph of our political independence," the "complement of the revolution." Even more important than its economic achievement, Everett maintained, Lowell stood as proof against the prejudice that factories must breed degradation and vice: "for physical comfort, moral conduct, general intelligence, and all the qualities of social character which make up an enlightened New England community, Lowell might safely enter into a comparison with any town or city in the land."[97] According to Amos Lawrence, one of the owners, Lowell proved there was no reason to believe "that the character of our people will degenerate, or their true happiness be diminished, while the wealth of our country is increased."[98]

Lowell's reputation as a moral and technological marvel brought a steady stream of visitors. When President Andrew Jackson arrived in 1833, he was greeted with a procession of twenty-five hundred factory girls clad in white dresses with blue sashes, carrying parasols and bearing banners calling for "Protection to American Industry." Other visitors included Davy Crockett, President Polk, and a parade of foreigners, including Charles Dickens. Most came away impressed with Lowell's apparent reconciliation of large-scale manufactures and republican ideals.[99]

But even as Lowell was lauded at home and abroad, its vaunted republican character was breaking down. Wage cuts, industrial growth, urbanization, and the transformation of the labor market soon undermined the harmonious vision of Lowell's founders. One ingredient of that vision was the assumption that relatively high wages would attract intelligent, respectable workers from the countryside and prevent their degradation. If wages fell or conditions deteriorated, workers could retain their independence by returning to the farm.

But in 1834 Lowell's directors responded to an economic downturn with a 25 percent wage cut. The workers "turned out," or struck, without success. The strikers protested not only the wage cuts but also the paternalistic scheme of supervision and discipline. "[I]t was not the reduction of wages alone which caused the excitement," said one of the protesters, "but that haughty, overbearing disposition, that purse-proud insolence, which was becoming more and more apparent."[100] With the depression of 1837, owners were able to impose further wage cuts and still retain sufficient workers to operate the mills. A labor newspaper of the 1840s complained that "American workingmen and women will not long suffer this gradual system of republican encroachment, which is fast reducing them to dependence, vassalage and slavery."[101] But the growing protest had little effect; not until 1853 did the Lowell corporation shorten the work day to eleven hours.[102]

As working conditions deteriorated and discontent grew, the textile mills became less attractive to young New England women. But the massive Irish immigration of the late 1840s relieved company owners of any pressure to meet workers' demands. The new immigrants offered a cheap and abundant labor supply and soon replaced the daughters of Yankee farmers in the mills. In 1845 Irish workers comprised 7 percent of Lowell's textile operatives; by the early 1850s they constituted half the labor force, and grew in subsequent years. The temporary work force that in the beginning was meant to avoid a dependent, impoverished proletariat gave way to permanent factory population. "In less than a decade Lowell lost its prized population of well-educated and temporary New England women and with it the factory system's very rationale."[103]

Meanwhile, American manufacturing was changing in ways that would soon abandon even the gesture to republican ideals. In hopes of increasing productivity, textile manufacturers turned from water power to steam, which could power larger mills. Larger factories increased the attraction of urban settings. The republican promise of small factories dispersed throughout the countryside gave way in the face of the economic advantages of cities. Industrial managers of the 1840s pointed out that America's large commercial cities offered a population willing to work at low wages, and without the housing the Lowell mills had to build to recruit workers. After 1850, "[t]he concerns that had motivated the

founding of Lowell were largely abandoned," and "earlier American reservations about the moral and political consequences of manufacturing cities" were forgotten.[104]

Economic Argument in the Jacksonian Era

Seen through the lens of present-day political argument, the underlying concerns of Jacksonian-era politics seem similar to our own. In their rancorous debates over banking, tariffs, and economic development, the Democrats and Whigs of the 1830s and 1840s made frequent appeal to arguments of economic growth and distributive justice. Whigs such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster argued that their program of a national bank, a protective tariff, and government-sponsored internal improvements would increase national wealth. Democrats led by Jackson objected that such policies would enrich the powerful at the expense of the common man and lead to an unjust distribution of wealth. In a pattern of argument familiar in our time, Whigs replied that economic growth would benefit farmers and laborers as well as businessmen and bankers, that a rising tide would lift all boats.[105]

Jacksonians were troubled above all by the unequal distribution of wealth between producers and those they considered nonproducers, such as merchants, capitalists, and bankers. They complained that the market society emerging around them gave its greatest rewards to those who contributed least. "[T]he workingman is poor and depressed," wrote Democratic radical Orestes Brownson, "while a large portion of the non-workingmen, in the sense we use the term, are wealthy. It may be laid down as a general rule, with but few exceptions, that men are rewarded in an inverse ratio to the amount of actual service they perform."[106] The New York *Evening Post* voiced the same protest more vividly: "Who is it that rolls in his carriage with gilded harness; revels in all the luxuries of the earth; builds palaces and outdoes princes in his entertainments? Is it the man who labours all day and every day? Is it the possessor of houses and lands or anything real? No—it is the minion of paper money."[107]

Leading Whigs and their supporters replied that accumulated wealth and the credit system worked to the benefit of ordinary Americans by

increasing the national wealth. They argued that economic growth would do more for the poor than attempts to distribute existing wealth more equally. "Whatever objections may be made to the existing distribution of riches," wrote journalist and sometime Whig Richard Hildreth, "this at least must be conceded, that no mere redistribution of the existing mass of wealth could effectually answer the proposed purpose of elevating the people. Any such redistribution . . . would still leave everybody poor, at the same time that it cut up by the roots a great mass of industrious occupations. . . . Above and beyond any of these schemes of redistribution, in order to redeem the mass of the people from poverty and its incidents, a great increase in the amount both of accumulated wealth and of annual products is absolutely essential."[108]

Whig Congressman Edward Everett, speaking in praise of "accumulation, property, capital, [and] credit," argued that the vast fortune of a leading capitalist served the community well: "What better use could have been made of it? Will it be said, divide it equally among the community; give each individual in the United States a share? It would have amounted to half a dollar each for man, woman, and child; and, of course, might as well have been sunk in the middle of the sea. Such a distribution would have been another name for annihilation. How many ships would have furled their sails, how many warehouses would have closed their shutters, how many wheels, heavily laden with the products of industry, would have stood still, how many families would have been reduced to want, and without any advantage resulting from the distribution?"[109]

Despite this surface similarity, however, the terms of debate in the age of Jackson map uneasily onto our own. In recent decades, those most concerned with distributive justice have argued for a more activist government—a progressive tax system, social welfare programs, laws regulating the health and safety of workers; those most concerned with economic growth have typically argued for less government intervention—lower tax rates, less government regulation. In the Jacksonian era, these sides were reversed. Then it was the Democrats, the party of farmers, mechanics, and laborers, who argued for limited government, while the Whigs, the party of business and banking and industry, favored a more activist government, even including an industrial policy to guide national economic development.

Jacksonian Political Economy

Jacksonian Democrats favored a laissez-faire philosophy of government that finds its present-day expression in "antigovernment" politicians such as Ronald Reagan and libertarian economists such as Milton Friedman. "The best government is that which governs least," declared the Jacksonian *Democratic Review*. "A strong and active democratic government, in the common sense of the term, is an evil, differing only in degree and mode of operation, and not in nature, from a strong despotism. . . . Government should have as little as possible to do with the general business and interests of the people. . . . Its domestic action should be confined to the administration of justice, for the protection of the natural equal rights of the citizen and the preservation of social order."[110] The Jacksonian editorialist William Leggett condemned even such minimal government functions as running the post office, maintaining an insane asylum for the poor, or inspecting bakeries and butcheries.[111]

Unlike Democrats since the time of the New Deal, Andrew Jackson considered government the enemy, not the instrument of justice for the common man. This conviction stemmed partly from his view of government, and partly from his conception of justice. When government intervened in the economy, Jackson maintained, it was bound to favor the rich and the powerful. In any case, justice did not require that government redress the unequal talents and abilities by which some get more and others less. "Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law."[112]

According to Jackson, the problem was not how to use government to promote an equality of condition, but how to prevent the rich and the powerful from using government to secure privileges, subsidies, and special advantages. "It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. . . . If [government] would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing."[113]

The economic debates of the Jacksonian era differ from our own in ways that go beyond the parties' stance toward government and display the persistence of republican themes in the 1830s and 1840s. Although Jacksonians and Whigs did invoke arguments of economic growth and distributive justice, these considerations figured less as ends in themselves than as means to competing visions of a self-governing republic. The Jacksonian objection to the growing inequality of wealth had less to do with fairness than with the threat to self-government posed by large concentrations of wealth and power. The Whig case for promoting economic development had less to do with increasing the standard of living or maximizing consumption than with cultivating national community and strengthening the bonds of the union. Underlying the debates between Democrats and Whigs were competing visions of a political economy of citizenship.

In different ways, both parties shared Jefferson's conviction that the economic life of the nation should be judged for its capacity to cultivate in citizens the qualities of character that self-government requires. By the 1830s few assumed, as Jefferson once did, that the agrarian life was the only way to civic competence.[114] But even as the parties turned their attention to the national bank, protective tariffs, land policy, and internal improvements, both Democrats and Whigs retained contact with the formative ambition of the republican tradition.

Jackson's policies and rhetoric reflected republican hopes and fears in two respects. First, his stand against the Bank of the United States, and against federal support for commerce and industry, reflected the traditional republican fear that powerful, self-interested forces would dominate government, secure special privileges, and deprive the people of their right to rule. Second, his hostility to large-scale business, banking, and speculation sprang from the conviction that only industrious producers such as farmers, mechanics, and laborers possessed the virtue and independence necessary to self-government. The concentration of power represented by a national bank and a paper currency would corrupt republican government directly, by giving subsidies and privileges to a favored few; meanwhile, the spirit of speculation those institutions encouraged would corrupt republican government indirectly, by undermining the moral qualities republican citizenship requires.[115]

According to its defenders, the Bank of the United States promoted economic stability by regulating the money supply through control of its widely accepted notes. According to its opponents, this power over the nation's currency rivaled the power of the government itself and unjustly enriched the bank's private investors. To Jackson, the bank was a "monster," a "hydra of corruption," and he resolved to destroy it. His war against the bank was the defining issue of his presidency and illustrated both aspects of the Jacksonian political economy of citizenship.

At one level, the struggle over the bank demonstrated the danger of concentrated power. "The result of the ill-advised legislation which established this great monopoly," declared Jackson, "was to concentrate the whole moneyed power of the Union, with its boundless means of corruption and its numerous dependents, under the direction and command of one acknowledged head . . . enabling it to bring forward upon any occasion its entire and undivided strength to support or defeat any measure of the Government." Had the bank not been destroyed, "the Government would have passed from the hands of the many to the hands of the few, and this organized money power from its secret conclave would have dictated the choice of your highest officers and compelled you to make peace or war, as best suited their own wishes. The forms of your Government might for a time have remained, but its living spirit would have departed from it."[116]

At another level, beyond even the evils of concentrated power, an economy dominated by commerce, banking, and business threatened to corrupt republican government by eroding the moral habits that sustain it. The fluctuations of paper currency "engender a spirit of speculation injurious to the habits and character of the people." Wild speculation in land and stock "threatened to pervade all classes of society and to withdraw their attention from the sober pursuits of honest industry. It is not by encouraging this spirit that we shall best preserve public virtue." Paper money fostered an "eager desire to amass wealth without labor" that would "inevitably lead to corruption" and destroy republican government.[117]

In its libertarian moments, Jacksonian politics gestured toward the procedural republic and the notion that government should play no part in forming the character or cultivating the virtue of its citizens. For

example, Orestes Brownson claimed, contrary to the republican tradition, that liberty "is not the power to choose our own form of government, to elect our own rulers, and through them to make and administer our own laws," but simply the ability to exercise individual rights without government interference. "So long as the individual trespasses upon none of the rights of others, or throws no obstacle in the way of their free and full exercise, government, law, public opinion even, must leave him free to take his own course."[118]

But unlike modern libertarians, who defend individual rights while insisting that government be neutral among competing conceptions of the good life, Jacksonians explicitly affirmed a certain way of life and sought to cultivate a certain kind of citizen. Like Jefferson and Madison, Jackson frequently justified his economic policies on formative grounds, citing their consequences for the moral character of citizens. Removing public deposits from the Bank of the United States was "necessary to preserve the morals of the people."[119] Restoring gold and silver specie as the medium of exchange would "revive and perpetuate those habits of economy and simplicity which are so congenial to the character of republicans."[120] Refusing federal support for internal improvements and mass markets would preserve an economy of independent producers and make the world safe for the virtue-sustaining occupations that suited Americans to self-government. "The planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer all know that their success depends upon their own industry and economy, and that they must not expect to become suddenly rich by the fruits of their toil." Such citizens were "the bone and sinew of the country—men who love liberty and desire nothing but equal rights and equal laws."[121]

In the twentieth century, laissez-faire doctrines would celebrate the market economy and the freedom of choice the market supposedly secured. In the age of Jackson, however, laissez-faire notions served a different role, embedded as they were in a vision of "the good republican life." This was the vision, as Marvin Meyers describes it, "of independent producers, secure in their modest competence, proud in their natural dignity, confirmed in their yeoman character, responsible masters of their fate—the order of the Old Republic." Jacksonians assumed that "when government governed least, society—made of the right republican materials—would realize its own natural moral discipline."[122]

No champion of capitalist enterprise, Jackson sought to limit government not to give greater scope to market relations but to slow their advance. Without the "artificial" support of government subsidies and protective tariffs, Jackson believed, large-scale manufacturing, banking, and capitalist enterprise would not soon overrun the economy of small, independent producers. This explains the otherwise strange coexistence in a single political outlook of laissez-faire individualism and the republican concern with the moral character of the people. "Americans of the Jacksonian persuasion took their doctrines of liberty and laissez faire . . . not as a stimulant to enterprise but as a purgative to bring the Old Republic . . . back to moral health."[123] Government would promote virtue not directly, through legislation, but indirectly, by holding off the economic forces that threatened to undermine it.

Whig Political Economy

Although the Whigs welcomed the economic changes Jacksonians opposed, they too advanced a political economy of citizenship and attended to the moral consequences of economic arrangements. "Beginning with the same body of republican tradition as the Democrats, the Whigs chose to emphasize different themes within it and offered a dramatically different assessment of economic changes promised by the Market Revolution."[124] Jacksonians and Whigs shared the republican notions that centralized power is the enemy of liberty and that government should concern itself with the moral character of its citizens. But they applied these teachings differently to the circumstances of nineteenth-century American life.

While Jacksonians feared centralized economic power, the Whigs feared centralized executive power. As Whigs saw it, the threat that power posed to liberty was not to be found in the forces of industry, banking, and commerce, but instead in Jackson's conception of the presidency. When Jackson vetoed the recharter of the Bank of the United States, removed its public deposits, and transferred them to state banks, opponents accused him of "Caesarism," "executive usurpation," and dictatorial designs. Previous presidents had used the veto power infrequently, applying it only to laws they deemed unconstitutional, not laws they

simply disagreed with.[125] Confronted with the "Monster," Jackson observed no such restraint. "We are in the midst of a revolution," Henry Clay declared, "hitherto bloodless, but rapidly descending towards a total change of the pure republican character of the government, and to the concentration of all power in the hands of one man."[126]

In 1834 Clay and his followers among National Republicans adopted the name "Whig," after the English opposition party that had drawn on republican themes to resist the arbitrary power of the Crown. Like their English namesakes, Clay and the American Whigs saw the greatest threat to republican government in the abuse of executive power. Invoking the memory of the Revolution, Clay hailed the British Whigs as champions of liberty and opponents of royal executive power. "And what is the present but the same contest in another form? . . . The whigs of the present day are opposing executive encroachment, and a most alarming extension of executive power and prerogative. They are ferreting out the abuses and corruptions of an administration, under a chief magistrate who is endeavoring to concentrate in his own person the whole powers of government."[127] Whig political cartoons portrayed Jackson as "King Andrew I." The first successful Whig presidential candidate, William Henry Harrison, won the White House in 1840 on a platform of executive restraint, promising to use the veto sparingly, to poll his cabinet on decisions, and not to seek a second term.[128]

The Whigs' emphasis on balanced government and fear of executive tyranny fit firmly within the republican tradition that echoed from classical and Renaissance thought to the "country party" opposition of eighteenth-century English politics. Their enthusiasm for commerce, industry, and economic development, however, set them apart. The classical republican tradition had seen commerce as antithetical to virtue, a source of luxury and corruption that distracted citizens from the public good. From the time of the Revolution, American republicans had worried about the civic consequences of large-scale commercial and manufacturing enterprises. The early Jefferson had seen civic virtue as dependent on a simple agrarian economy. And although Jacksonians enlarged the range of virtue-sustaining occupations to include independent laborers and mechanics as well as farmers, they feared that the market revolution unfolding in their day would erode the moral qualities self-government required.[129]

Even as Whigs advocated economic development, however, they retained the formative ambition of the republican tradition. They accepted the republican assumptions that self-government requires certain moral and civic qualities among citizens, and that economic arrangements should be assessed for their tendency to promote those qualities. Their argument with Jacksonians was about what virtues self-government required of nineteenth-century Americans, and how best to promote them.

The Whigs' formative project had two aspects. One was to deepen the bonds of union and cultivate a shared national identity. The other was to elevate the morality of the people, to strengthen their respect for order and their capacity for self-control. Whigs sought to realize these aims through a policy of national economic development and through various public institutions, from schools to reformatories to asylums, designed to improve the moral character of the people.

The centerpiece of Whig economic policy was Henry Clay's "American System." Unlike the British system of laissez-faire economic development, Clay's proposal sought to foster economic development by giving explicit government encouragement to national economic growth. High tariffs would encourage American manufacturing by protecting it from foreign competition. High prices for federal lands would slow westward expansion and generate revenues to support an ambitious program of internal improvements such as roads, canals, and railroads. And a national bank would ease tax collection, commercial transactions, and public spending by establishing a strong currency.[130]

Whigs justified their program of economic development on grounds of prosperity but also on grounds of national integration. The internal "improvements" they sought to foster were moral as well as material. The "idea of progress" was "to bring out the material resources of America" and also "to improve the mind and heart of America."[131] National transportation and communication facilities would promote national harmony as well as commerce and morally uplift remote regions of the country. A railroad from New England to Georgia would "harmonize the feelings of the whole country."[132] Linking the uncivilized West to the East would, according to a Christian Whig journal, promote morality and salvation: "The sooner we have railroads and telegraphs spinning into the wilderness, and setting the remotest hamlets in connexion and close

proximity with the east, the more certain it is that light, good manners, and christian refinement will become universally diffused."[133] A Richmond newspaper concluded, "Truly are rail roads bonds of union, of social, of national union."[134]

Clay proposed to fund internal improvements by distributing to the states revenue derived from the sale of public lands. Such a policy would do more than provide resources for important public projects. It would also create "a new and powerful bond of affection and of interest" between the states and the federal government. The states would be grateful for the federal largesse, and the federal government would enjoy "the benefits of moral and intellectual improvement of the people, of great facility in social and commercial intercourse, and of the purification of the population of our country, themselves the best parental sources of national character, national union, and national greatness."[135]

Given their ambition to deepen the bonds of union, Whigs lacked the Jacksonian appetite for territorial expansion. In opposing the annexation of Texas, Daniel Webster revived the classical argument that a republic cannot extend across an unlimited space. An arbitrary regime could be as vast as its army's reach, but republics must cohere "by the assimilation of interests and feelings; by a sense of common country, common political family, common character, fortune and destiny." Such commonality would be difficult to cultivate if the nation expanded too quickly: "there must be some boundary, or some limits to a republic which is to have a common centre . . . political attraction, like other attractions, is less and less powerful, as the parts become more and more distant."[136]

It was on these grounds that Webster opposed the Mexican War and the subsequent acquisition of New Mexico and California. His public life had been dedicated to making Americans "one people, one in interest, one in character, and one in political feeling," Webster declared in 1848. But "what sympathy can there be between the people of Mexico and California" and the rest of the United States? None at all, Webster concluded. "Arbitrary governments may have territories and distant possessions, because arbitrary governments may rule them by different laws and different systems. . . . We can do no such thing. They must be of us, *part* of us, or else strangers."[137]

The Whigs' case for industry, technology, even prosperity itself was closely tied to the moral and civic benefits these developments would bring. "They never employed the argument later apologists for American business would sometimes use, that profitability itself is an indicator of social utility." As Daniel Walker Howe observes, Whig political economy did not assume that prosperity was its own justification; the republican tradition had taught otherwise. Whigs "had to overcome the idea that 'commerce' was opposed to 'virtue' and constituted a threat to it. This had been a major convention of classical-Renaissance-commonwealth thought, and it remained powerful in Jacksonian rhetoric. . . . The Whigs were resolving an age-old polarity in the country-party tradition by arguing that commerce could nourish virtue."[138]

Beyond a political economy of national integration and moral improvement, the Whigs pursued their formative aims through a range of public institutions and benevolent societies designed to build character and inculcate self-control. These efforts included insane asylums, penitentiaries, almshouses, juvenile reformatories, Sunday schools, the temperance movement, and factory communities such as the one at Lowell. Whigs were prominent among the founders and leaders of these institutions and movements, which reflected the religious impulses of evangelical Protestantism and the reformist, paternalist aspect of Whig political thought. Although Whigs welcomed the economic changes of their day, they worried about the social changes, such as the decline of deference, the rise of immmigration, and the general breakdown of the moral order of small-town, rural life.[139]

The blend of religious and civic concerns characteristic of Whig reform can be found in Daniel Webster's praise for the Sunday school movement. "The Sabbath School is one of the great institutions of the day," he wrote. "It leads our youth in the path of truth and morality, and makes them good and useful citizens. As a school of religious instruction it is of inestimable value; as a civil institution it is priceless, and has done more to preserve our liberties than grave statesmen and armed soldiers."[140]

In a democratic age teeming with disorder, Whigs emphasized obedience, discipline, and self-control as the qualities essential to self-government. "The present is a period of great restlessness and agitation among the popular elements of the world," warned Whig congressman Daniel

Barnard. "The established order of things is almost every where being questioned, disturbed, and, in many cases, subverted." This condition posed a challenge to republican government. "Perhaps the severest trial to which the virtue of any people can be subjected, is when every man has a share in the government; for when every one governs, few indeed are willing to submit to be governed; when every one commands, nobody likes to obey. Yet the habit and practice of obedience is indispensable to the moral health of every people."[141]

Of all the Whig projects of moral and civic improvement, their most ambitious instrument of republican soulcraft was the public school. As Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts, explained, if all were to share in governing, then true to the republican tradition, all would have to be equipped with the requisite moral and intellectual resources: "with universal suffrage, there must be universal elevation of character, intellectual and moral, or there will be universal mismanagement and calamity." The question whether human beings are capable of self-government admits only a conditional answer; they are capable insofar as they possess the intelligence and goodness and breadth of view to govern on behalf of the public good. "But men are not *born* in the full possession of such an ability," nor do they necessarily develop it as they grow to adulthood.[142]

The role of the public schools, therefore, is to cultivate in citizens the qualities of character republican government requires: "As each citizen is to participate in the power of governing others, it is an essential preliminary that he should be imbued with a feeling for the wants, and a sense of the rights, of those whom he is to govern; because the power of governing others, if guided by no higher motive than our own gratification, is the distinctive attribute of oppression; an attribute whose nature and whose wickedness are the same, whether exercised by one who calls himself a republican, or by one born an irresponsible despot."[143]

The curriculum of the schools should reflect their purpose, said Mann, and give ample attention to civic and moral education: "principles of morality should [be] copiously intermingled with the principles of science"; the Golden Rule should become as familiar as the multiplication table. As for the controversy that inevitably attends instruction in politics, morals, and religion, Mann urged that the public schools aim at a broad

middle ground. In politics, they should teach "those articles in the creed of republicanism which are accepted by all," but avoid partisan disputes. In morals and religion, they should convey the teachings, in effect, of nondenominational Protestantism, including "all the practical and preceptive parts of the Gospel" but excluding "all dogmatical theology and sectarianism." If such teaching could be widely diffused, Mann had boundless hopes for the redemptive possibilities: "if all the children in the community, from the age of four years to that of sixteen, could be brought within the reformatory and elevating influences of good schools, the dark host of private vices and public crimes which now imbitter domestic peace, and stain the civilization of the age, might, in ninety-nine cases in every hundred, be banished from the world."[144]

The Public Good

In addition to sharing the formative ambition of republican politics, Jacksonians and Whigs retained the related assumption that the public good is more than the sum of individual preferences or interests. Madison had sought this good in the deliberation of an elite group of enlightened statesmen acting at some distance from popular passions, "a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the country."[145] The parties in the age of Jackson did not think democracy could be filtered so finely. They sought a public good beyond the play of interests on terms consistent with the heightened democratic expectations of their day.

"No free government can stand without virtue in the people and a lofty spirit of patriotism," Jackson declared, echoing a traditional republican view; "if the sordid feelings of mere selfishness shall usurp the place which ought to be filled by public spirit, the legislation of Congress will soon be converted into a scramble for personal and sectional advantages." But for Jackson, governing in accordance with the public good did not require an enlightened elite of disinterested statesmen; it simply required preventing the powerful few from dominating government and turning it to their selfish ends. The threat of interested politics came wholly from the moneyed interest. Those engaged in productive labor, "the great body of the people," had neither the inclination nor the

capacity to form factions to seek special favors from government; "from their habits and the nature of their pursuits they are incapable of forming extensive combinations to act together with united force." They "desire nothing but equal rights and equal laws" and are therefore, by definition, "uncorrupted and incorruptible."[146]

The Whigs were no less hostile to a politics of self-interest, but they doubted that any class of people possessed by nature the wisdom or virtue to identify the public good. Republicans were made, not born, and although it "may be an easy thing to make a republic . . . it is a very laborious thing to make republicans." Under conditions of universal suffrage, the laborious task of moral and political education would have to be extended to all.[147]

In a passage that stands, despite its hyperbole, as an enduring reproach to interest-based theories of democracy, Horace Mann warned of the consequences for the public good if citizens voted out of base or selfish motives: "In a republican government the ballot-box is the urn of fate; yet no god shakes the bowl or presides over the lot. If the ballot-box is open to wisdom and patriotism and humanity, it is equally open to ignorance and treachery, to pride and envy, to contempt for the poor or hostility towards the rich. It is the loosest filter ever devised to strain out impurities. . . . The criteria of a right to vote respect citizenship, age, residence, tax, and, in a few cases, property; but no inquiry can be put whether the applicant is a Cato or a Catiline . . . if the votes, which fall so copiously into the ballot-box on our days of election, emanate from wise counsels and a loyalty to truth, they will descend, like benedictions from Heaven, to bless the land and fill it with song and gladness . . . but if, on the other hand, these votes come from ignorance and crime, the fire and brimstone that were rained on Sodom and Gomorrah would be more tolerable."[148]