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Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic

Lance Banning

RECENT studies of the Jeffersonian Republicans may leave some readers at a loss. The last fifteen years have brought a new interpretation of the character and sources of Jeffersonian ideas.[1] This "republican hypothesis" (to modify a term of Robert E. Shalhope's) is a consequence of previous reinterpretations of American Revolutionary thought.[2] Like them, it places major emphasis on the persistent influence

Mr. Banning is a member of the Department of History at the University of Kentucky. A version of this article was presented at the convention of the Western Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Huntington Library, February 1984. He wishes to acknowledge an excellent commentary by Professor Appleby, which further clarified their differences, as well as sensitive readings by several friends.

[1] The new interpretation emerged as a collective product, although there are significant differences in individual views. Lance Gilbert Banning's "The Quarrel with Federalism: A Study in the Origins and Character of Republican Thought" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1971) was directed by John M. Murrin, who suggested that a major portion of the argument might be summarized in the form of "Republican Ideology and the Triumph of the Constitution, 1789 to 1793," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 167-188. J.G.A. Pocock, who served as second reader of the dissertation, drew upon its findings for portions of *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975) and for other works cited below. The dissertation also influenced Drew R. McCoy, "Republicanism and American Foreign Policy: James Madison and the Political Economy of Commercial Discrimination, 1789 to 1794," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 633-646, and "The Republican Revolution: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America, 1776 to 1817" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1976). All these works, in turn, profoundly influenced Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978). A similar interpretation of Jeffersonian thought was independently advanced in Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence, Kan., 1976). Murrin, "The Great Inversion, or Court versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1688-1721) and America (1776-1816)," in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 368-453, is an important recent addition.

[2] Especially Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969).

in the new American republic of concepts, hopes, and fears that may be traced to England's seventeenth-century classical republicans and their eighteenth-century opposition heirs. As Shalhope tells us, though, the same fifteen years have also seen the rapid growth of a variegated criticism of revisionary views of Revolutionary thinking.[3] The reinterpretation of the Jeffersonians has been erected on unstable ground, and in several recent works Joyce Appleby has charged that it is simply wrong, urging a renewed attention to what might be called a "liberal hypothesis."[4] The specialists seem so at odds that general readers must be sorely puzzled and historians are faced with an imposing barrier to further study.

This article seeks to get beyond that barrier, which may not be as insurmountable as first appears. Appleby and those she criticizes are all concerned to come to closer grips with Jeffersonian opinion, an enterprise that has large stakes not only for our comprehension of the new republic but for efforts to reshape our understanding of America in the fifty years and more after the first party quarrel came to an end. There are major differences among these scholars, which can be clarified where they cannot be reconciled. When that is done, it should be evident that Appleby and her opponents have all grasped portions of important truths, that all have been incautious, and that insights from both camps must be combined for further progress. As things now stand, the literature appears to force a choice between mutually exclusive interpretations of Jeffersonian ideology—a choice we do not really have to make, and one that would impede a better understanding.

Current scholarship, writes Appleby—from Richard Hofstadter to J.G.A. Pocock, Lance Banning, John M. Murrin, and Drew R. McCoy—"points Jefferson and his party in the wrong direction," toward nostalgia for the past instead of enthusiasm for the future, toward admiration for "agrarian self-sufficiency" rather than acceptance of commercial development. This scholarship makes Jefferson "the heroic loser in a battle against modernity," whereas he was actually the "conspicuous winner in a contest over how the government should serve its citizens."[5]

[3] Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 334-356. Also useful is Daniel Walker Howe, "European Sources of Political Ideas in Jeffersonian America," *Reviews in American History*, X (December 1982), 28-44.

[4] Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History*, LXVIII (1982), 833-849; "What Is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 287-309; and *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984). See also Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *American Historical Review*, LXXXVII (1982), 629-664, and John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1985). Kramnick and Diggins both specifically endorse Appleby's interpretation, but neither discusses America between 1789 and 1815.

[5] Appleby, "Commercial Farming and 'Agrarian Myth'," *JAH*, LXVIII (1982), 836-837.

Between 1755 and 1820, Appleby points out, European demand for the grain and other commodities produced by American farmers expanded dramatically, while West Indian demand continued strong. The resulting opportunity for ordinary people to prosper by producing for the Atlantic market was not viewed apprehensively by Jefferson and other Virginia nationalists. On the contrary, these changing circumstances became the material base for a new social vision that owed little to the past, that was "both democratic and capitalistic, agrarian and commercial."[6] The prospect of an expanding, improving, commercial mode of agriculture persuaded Jefferson and others that the bulk of the American people could enjoy a rising standard of living, unprecedented social and economic independence, and—with these—political freedom. From 1783, therefore, Virginia nationalists and Jeffersonian Republicans advocated policies of making new lands available to farmers, opening world markets, and developing internal improvements, while they opposed fiscal measures that would burden farmer-owners. Such policies were "neither regional nor, strictly speaking, agrarian."[7] They entailed "neither American isolation nor a slowed pace of growth." They represented, in fact, "a form of capitalism" that looked to free trade to create "the integrative network that social authority supplied elsewhere."[8] The Jeffersonians, in sum, did not pit "rich against poor, or the commercially inclined against the self-sufficient," but sought a freely developing economy that would benefit all, eradicate privilege, and "stimulate the natural harmony of interest" among the propertied that John Locke had assumed.[9] In Jeffersonian hands, expanding involvement in the Atlantic economy became the context for "the flowering of liberal thought in America."[10] It was hardly an occasion for revival of agrarian nostalgia and British opposition fears.

Proponents of the views attacked in "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic" must first protest that they have not been carefully represented in the essay. Close examination of the article reveals that Appleby's target is fuzzier than first appears and that she seems to make a sharper challenge to recent work than is in fact the case. The essay opens with a summary of Hofstadter's portrayal of the Jeffersonians as celebrators of the self-sufficient yeoman, although none of the recent writers has been significantly influenced by Hofstadter's point of view. Appleby repeatedly objects to an interpretation that regards the Jeffersonians as spokesmen for the self-sufficient against the commercially inclined. Yet Pocock says that Jeffersonians derived from England's seventeenth-century republicans *both* a belief that men engaged in commerce are capable of republican citizenship *and* an archetype of the landed man as the ideal, autonomous citizen; they did not oppose commerce or technological improvements but "the alliance of government, finance and

[6] *Ibid.*, 844.
[7] *Ibid.*, 847.
[8] *Ibid.*, 848.
[9] *Ibid.*, 849.
[10] *Ibid.*

standing army."[11] Banning's *Jeffersonian Persuasion* specifically denies that either English oppositionists or Jeffersonian Republicans identified their enemies as those involved in manufacturing or commerce; both groups commonly contrasted the virtuous freeholder, not with merchants or manufacturers, but with government officers, public creditors, and stockjobbers.[12] And the central theme of McCoy's *Elusive Republic* is the Jeffersonian attempt to reconcile received republican values with *rejection* of an isolated, Spartan mode of life.[13] Maintaining that the Jeffersonians conceived commercial growth as vital to the perpetuation of a virtuous citizenry, the latter book, indeed, has been our most important source for fuller understanding of the Republican commitment to free trade and to the acquisition of new lands on which American farmers would produce for the Atlantic market. Recent scholarship, in short, does not advance quite the interpretation that Appleby condemns. It may, in fact, claim some of the responsibility for arguments that she develops.

Similar objections can be raised, this time with louder voice, to the second article in which Professor Appleby elaborates her criticism of interpretations emphasizing British opposition sources of Republican ideas.[14] Jefferson's dislike of Montesquieu, she argues, hints further difficulties with recent views. Jefferson strongly favored commercial developments and economic innovations about which the civic-humanist tradition was suspicious; he also held a concept of human nature radically at odds with Montesquieu's. Montesquieu was essentially an advocate of aristocratic power who believed that republics must rest on commitment to the public good and must thus be small and founded on a frugal, homogeneous citizenry. Jefferson, by contrast, accepted James Madison's alternative to the small republic. His object was not to raise power to check power in a civic arena where men would attain fulfillment by rising above self-interest, but to secure a polity that would protect the private and personal realm where men would freely exercise their faculties. He praised Destutt de Tracy's critique of Montesquieu because Tracy's

[11] J.G.A. Pocock, ed., *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), 151.

[12] Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion*, 68, 204-205, 269. See also Murrin, "Great Inversion," in Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions*, 417-418.

[13] American Revolutionaries did not distrust "independent artisans and mechanics" but "poverty-stricken, landless laborers, and especially those [large-scale manufactories] dependent on government subsidy and promotion." "The Revolutionaries did not seek to reject a proper degree of civilization in the name of republicanism; they wished only to stop at the point where refinement became corruption" (Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980], 65, 73). Some recent works come closer than Banning or McCoy to advancing the view Appleby condemns, as will be discussed below. I single out these books because they are the fullest presentations of recent views and are similarly selected in Appleby's second article.

[14] Appleby, "What Is Still American?" *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 287-309.

analysis began with individuals, not social orders, and because it sought to eradicate social injustice by eliminating privilege and protecting a natural equality of rights.

Appleby's Jefferson, in brief, espoused a "liberal economic order" incompatible with Country ideology. He was "temperamentally at odds with the reverence for the past nurtured by civic humanism" and "repeatedly insisted that his was the party of change."[15] Claims that Jefferson was under the influence of eighteenth-century opposition thought must thus result from a misreading. Banning and McCoy, Appleby charges, have *assumed* an influence of Country ideas on the Republicans without presenting "confirming evidence" for such an influence, presuming that a search for such was "unnecessary" in light of the work of Bernard Bailyn, Gordon S. Wood, and others.[16] After 1789, Appleby concludes, the Country-minded and the Court-minded, sharing a traditional vocabulary, both became Federalists. The Jeffersonians broke more completely with the past. Placing their faith in a limited rather than a balanced government, they sought to nurture capitalist development by freeing the private energies of equal men.

A reading of *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* or *The Elusive Republic* would suffice, I trust, to refute the surprising charge that neither offers solid evidence for opposition influences on Republican ideas. It is more important to remark that Appleby's criticism of these books would be more telling if either of them really argued what she says they do. Appleby objects to works that "have depicted the thought of Americans in the 1790s as *encapsulated in* the conceptual world of Montesquieu's civic humanism"; she condemns "the recent scholarly effort to *assimilate* Jefferson into the Country party tradition of eighteenth-century England."[17] No such effort was intended by most of the authors mentioned in her critiques, nor does it seem to me that recent scholarship is fairly taxed with leaving the impression that there were no significant differences between the Jeffersonians and their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources.

The implications of this point are too important to pass over. Both Appleby and Isaac Kramnick, who has endorsed her point of view, write as though the recent claims that Jeffersonians were strongly influenced by English opposition thought are equivalent to claims for the *identity* of Jeffersonian and opposition thinking, perhaps particularly for an identification of the thought of the Republicans with that of Bolingbroke or Montesquieu, who both defended a traditional hierarchical social order. Nearly everyone who has advanced these claims would certainly deny that this has been the point. Indeed, some might complain that critics have occasionally come close to standing arguments upon their heads.[18]

[15] *Ibid.*, 308, 306.

[16] *Ibid.*, 302-303.

[17] *Ibid.*, 302, 288. My emphases.

[18] An exception might be made for McDonald, *Presidency of Jefferson*, esp. 19-22: Jeffersonian ideology "was borrowed *in toto* from such Oppositionists as Charles

For example, Appleby maintains that "historians of the early national period have recently claimed that the classical" republicanism that can be found in the works of John Adams "dominated American politics well into the nineteenth century."[19] None of these historians has actually advanced this notion. As early as 1977 Pocock wrote, "It is notorious that classical republicanism was . . . transformed in the making of the Federal Constitution and the Federalist and Republican minds."[20] *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* explicitly accepts Wood's argument for an "end of classical politics" and the repudiation of Adams, while qualifying this by suggesting that rejection of the concept of a balance of social orders did not entail an end of other traditional concerns.[21] *The Elusive Republic,* accepting major arguments of Wood and Banning while transcending their concern with political and constitutional ideas, emphasizes the *ambivalence* of Republican attitudes toward manufacturing and commerce, rising from their struggle to combine a commitment to prosperity, active industry, and economic growth with a traditional distrust of the potential civic consequences of these things. Recent scholarship, in short, often actually *insists* on American departures from received ideas, most especially on American hostility to privilege and American rejection of "the distinctions of class and rank whose balancing played so central a role in classical republicanism."[22] This scholarship should not be condemned as though the authors claimed that an entire, unchanging, civic-humanist tradition persisted into the new republic. Such criticism charges it with errors never made and caricatures a thesis that requires a subtler reading.

The Jeffersonian Persuasion, The Elusive Republic, Murrin's "Great Inversion," and other titles mentioned in Appleby's critiques are all revisionary studies. All maintain that previous interpretations of America's first party quarrel were imperfect in the absence of the fuller understanding of eighteenth-century British thinking pioneered by Caroline Robbins,

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Davenant, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, James Burgh, and most especially . . . Bolingbroke. As a well-rounded system, it is all to be found in the pages of the *Craftsman.* . . . The essence of [the Jeffersonian program was to] restore America to the pristine simplicity of an Arcadian past." McDonald obviously wrote this book with tongue sometimes in cheek, aiming for general readers and often seeking language designed to shock and rouse his fellow professionals. But McDonald's other recent work presents Alexander Hamilton as a modernizing, liberal hero and suggests that he would characterize the first American parties in terms almost opposite to those of Appleby. This view is shared by none of the other recent writers.

[19] Appleby, "What Is Still American?" *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 293.

[20] Pocock, ed., *Works of Harrington,* 147.

[21] Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion,* 84-103. "Adams was an eighteenth-century classical republican. . . . His friends were living in a different mental world. . . . Adams' failing was his inability to comprehend the changes in the theory of a balanced constitution that the concept of a democratic social order introduced" (*ibid.,* 97-98).

[22] Appleby, "What Is Still American?" *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 300.

Pocock, Kramnick, Bailyn, and others. All argue that comprehension of the new republic's politics was incomplete without a recognition of the parallels between American disputes and the familiar exchanges between the English Court and Country, together with a fuller appreciation of the continuing American concern with concepts, hopes, and worries that may be traced to classical antiquity by way of James Harrington and Niccolo Machiavelli.

All these works display some of the characteristic weaknesses of a revisionary effort. Their authors sought to add a new dimension to existing knowledge. They attempted to revise and alter, without entirely overturning, the body of previous scholarship. In the manner of revisionists, however—emphasizing new materials and stressing differences from older views—most of them were less explicit than they might have been about received opinions they did not dispute. Most were also guilty of incautious use of language, which is the more regrettable when passages are separated from their qualifying context. Flaws such as these are certainly responsible for some of our current confusion. But this confusion will be radically compounded if we fail to see that the Country ideology or opposition thinking identified in the majority of recent studies is simply not the Country ideology described by Appleby, or if we read these works as though they have denied the major changes in received ideas effected by the Revolution.

Appleby has fastened her attention on one of several groups that together composed the eighteenth-century opposition as most recent writers have described it—the backward-looking, fearful country gentlemen and their great Tory spokesman, Viscount Bolingbroke. She identifies the opposition heritage exclusively with Bolingbroke's reactionary posture and condemns her scholarly opponents for associating the American Republicans with Bolingbroke's or Montesquieu's world view. Two misleading consequences follow. First, arguments that Jeffersonians were influenced by some of Bolingbroke's ideas by no means necessarily imply that the Republicans adopted other aspects of the viscount's Tory thought or that revisionists believe that ideology was unaffected by the Revolution.[23] Second, an exclusive emphasis on a single aspect of a complex heritage seriously distorts the major emphases of several recent works and

[23] Chapter 2 of *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* discusses Bolingbroke as one of several outstanding figures in an opposition tradition to which radical Whigs contributed fully as much as reactionary Tories. It contains only passing references to Montesquieu. Similarly, when J.G.A. Pocock writes that the stance of the 18th-century opposition was that of a "radical right," it is clear he is referring to the demand for a return to an uncorrupted constitution ("Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXII [1965], 572). Whig or Tory, all oppositionists regarded patronage, "government by money," and much else as undesirable innovations. But British acceptance of the opposition's demand for the excision of these innovations would scarcely have been conservative in practical effects, nor were all opposition writers on the right of the political spectrum when the spectrum is defined in broader terms.

loses sight of their most important contributions. Revisionists have drawn attention to the influence on the Jeffersonians of civic-humanist preoccupation with virtue and corruption, to eighteenth-century concern with standing armies, public debts, executive influence, and government by money. They have stressed the Country's condemnation, not of commerce, but of financialism, mercantilism, and all-absorbing luxury.[24] Somewhere, nearly all of this has disappeared from Appleby's summary of Country thought and of the republican hypothesis.

Appleby's critiques suggest that recent scholarship has traveled ever farther down a fundamentally false trail, placing ever-growing emphasis on the nostalgic, anti-modern, Country bent of Jeffersonian thinking and failing to detect a crucial change. Quite the contrary is in fact the case. *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* advanced the thesis that the emergence and character of an opposition to Federalism "was dependent to an important and unrecognized degree on an *Americanization* of eighteenth-century opposition thought."[25] It sought not just to demonstrate a lingering regard for old ideas but to explain how specific classical and opposition concepts were *altered* in such ways that they continued to exert a vital influence in a setting very different from the one in which they had originally appeared. Since 1978, historians have focused with increasing intensity on the question how the Jeffersonians accommodated and adjusted their heritage of British opposition and classical republican ideas to their perception that the world was characterized increasingly by complexity, commercialization, specialization, and professionalism.[26] Far from being false, this trail has been productive of increasing insight—the right one to pursue.

Yet this is not to say that Appleby is altogether wrong. Revisionists *have* stressed the central influence on the Jeffersonians of British opposition thought, which had been overlooked before. In doing so, they may have given so much space and stress to what was old, inherited, and hesitant about the future at the core of Jeffersonian belief that there was need for a

[24] It needs to be emphatically reemphasized that even in the writings of Pocock, which stress the antithesis of virtue and commerce, it is not commerce defined as exchange that is identified as a focus of 18th-century worries. Revisionists have repeatedly insisted that commerce becomes a problem in 18th-century minds when it produces luxury, enervation, and single-minded attention to acquisition and enjoyment. Similarly, it might be noted that in *Capitalism and a New Social Order* Appleby identifies the Republicans with a capitalist vision partly by defining *capitalism* in terms of buying and selling (especially among farmers). Although I do not like the rather anachronistic use of this word, I would readily agree that Jeffersonians endorsed free exchange. Different conclusions emerge, however, if we associate capitalism primarily with entrepreneurial activities and investment.

[25] Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion,* 129. Emphasis added.

[26] In addition to McCoy see, for example, Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia, S.C., 1980), Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), and Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789-1829* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984).

revitalized insistence on what was progressive and new. To the degree that recent works have mistakenly or unintentionally overemphasized the conservative characteristics of Jeffersonian thought, Appleby's work should serve as a useful corrective. She helps us see more clearly the differences between the Jeffersonians and eighteenth-century British thinkers, among them differences that the revisionists themselves insisted on and differences that they neglected but would not deliberately deny. Her influence is already working to restore a better balance and to reinforce a growing emphasis on the varieties of Jeffersonian opinion.

Saying this, however, does not settle the dispute or even probe its depths. Thus far, I have suggested that the distance between Appleby and the revisionists will seem narrower if we recognize that most of the latter have neither argued nor deliberately implied that the Jeffersonians were wholly derivative or exclusively conservative in their thinking. Even so, the gap remains a large one. For Appleby does not intend a mere corrective. Rather, seconded by Kramnick, she rejects the major thesis of the recent work and calls for a renewed attention to the advent and influence of modern liberalism. Here—and not in classical republicanism or eighteenth-century opposition thought—we are to find a more appropriate beginning for studies of the origins and nature of the Jeffersonian impulse. No revisionist would wish to follow her to this extreme. Neither is it necessary that we choose between two such sharply irreconcilable points of view.

Analytically, of course, modern liberalism and classical republicanism are distinguishable philosophies. *Liberalism* is a label most would use for a political philosophy that regards man as possessed of inherent individual rights and the state as existing to protect these rights, deriving its authority from consent.[27] *Classical republicanism* is a term that scholars have employed to identify a mode of thinking about citizenship and the polity that may be traced from Aristotle through Machiavelli and Harrington to eighteenth-century Britain and her colonies. The two philosophies begin with different assumptions about human nature and develop a variety of different ideas. Their incompatibility will seem much more pronounced if we expand our use of *liberalism* to encompass capitalism or imply a bourgeois attitude and set of values.[28]

A full-blown, modern liberalism, as Appleby and Kramnick appear to use the term, posits a society of equal individuals who are motivated principally if not exclusively by their passions or self-interest; it identifies a proper government as one existing to protect these individuals' inherent rights and private pursuits. A fully classical republicanism, as Pocock may best explain, reasons from the diverse capacities and characteristics of

[27] I have no objection to identifying liberalism, if defined *this* way, particularly with John Locke. American historians have not ordinarily gone as far as Pocock toward discounting Locke's influence.

[28] As in C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962).

different social groups, whose members are political by nature. No republicanism will still be "classical" if it is not concerned with the individual's participation with others in civic decisions where the needs and powers of those others must be taken into account.[29] Liberalism, thus defined, is comfortable with economic man, with the individual who is intent on maximizing private satisfactions and who needs to do no more in order to serve the general good. Classical republicanism regards this merely economic man as less than fully human. Assuming a certain tension between public good and private desires, it will identify the unrestrained pursuit of purely private interests as incompatible with preservation of a commonwealth.

Liberal and classical ideas were both available to eighteenth-century Englishmen and to America's Revolutionary generation. Distinguishing between them is a useful scholarly pursuit. Identifying contradictions, tensions, or confusions in the thought of any individual or group who may have held ideas derived from two ultimately irreconcilable philosophies can certainly improve our understanding. But major difficulties will arise if we suppose that the analytical distinctions we detect were evident to those we study, or if we suggest that, in America, one of two separate and competing modes of thinking displaced the other in the years before 1815.

Logically, it may be inconsistent to be simultaneously liberal and classical. Historically, it was not. Eighteenth-century opposition thought was always a complex blend of liberal and classical ideas. So was the thought of America's Revolutionary generation. Jeffersonian Republicans inherited a way of thinking that accustomed men to move immediately from the concepts of a contractual origin of government and inherent individual rights to the assertion that a balanced form of government *and* sufficient virtue to preserve that form are necessary guarantees of liberty.[30] The major novelty and most important contribution of revisionary work has not been to deny that Revolutionary Americans and Jeffersonian Republicans were Lockean and liberal, but to demonstrate that liberal ideas were only part of their inheritance, to show that other parts of the inheritance assured that Jeffersonians could never be wholly comfortable with the increasing complexity and privatization of American life. Among the most important implications of this work is the suggestion

[29] Most helpful are Pocock, ed., *Works of Harrington*, 145-151; *Machiavellian Moment*, 115-116, 394-395, 523-527; and "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, III (1972), 119-134.

[30] For 18th-century blending of the two philosophies see *Jeffersonian Persuasion*, 55-69. The similarities between the two are as clear as their ultimate incompatibility, and the same thinkers often contributed to both. Liberalism and classical republicanism both insisted on a definition of the individual in terms of his autonomy. Both linked liberty with property. There were many points of contact and even of confusion.

that nineteenth-century America did not begin with and may never have achieved a liberal consensus.[31]

In developing this thesis, revisionists may well have overemphasized the similarities between the Jeffersonians and British oppositionists. They may have exaggerated the classical at the expense of the liberal dimensions of Jeffersonian thought, if only by assuming that the latter had received sufficient emphasis. They may thus have left an impression that the Jeffersonians were less progressive than they really were. This is the valid element in Appleby's protest. In recognizing this, however, let us take care not to tip the balance to an opposite extreme. While it is possible to throw a brilliant light on Jeffersonian ideology by emphasizing liberal and democratic ideas—consider Daniel J. Boorstin's classic book[32]—the benefits that have accrued from recent efforts to explain American disputes by reference to the exchanges between the English Court and Country are readily apparent when we measure how far we have come from Boorstin's point of view. While it is true that Jeffersonians were never strictly classical in their republicanism—no one has really argued that they were—neither were they merely liberal. Thus, although I would agree with Appleby that Federalism had both Court and Country wings, I would resist the rather contradictory suggestion that the party battles of the new republic can be described as contests pitting Federalist attachment to tradition against a liberal, Republican commitment to change. What do we do, on this hypothesis, with the substantial evidence that the cosmopolitan, most thoroughly commercial, and most aggressively capitalistic segments of new-republican society were Federalist in their politics?[33] What would we do with evidence, which remains persuasive to my mind, for the Country character of many Jeffersonian ideas? What, finally, would be the consequences of this thesis for our understanding of American developments in the years after 1815?

A premature discovery of a wholly liberal perspective holds risks beyond those most directly related to our understanding of the Jeffersonians. One of the most important consequences of the modern reinterpretation of Revolutionary republicanism has been the understanding that the Revolutionaries left to their successors a lasting and profound commitment to values and ideas that were not part of a liberal consensus, transmitting to their heirs a more complex political tradition whose rediscovery permits important reinterpretations of American developments and conflicts from the War of 1812 to Watergate.[34] This does not mean that the advent of a liberal perspective is without further value as an explanation of developments. It may mean, though, that we are well

[31] Cf. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955).

[32] Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston, 1948).

[33] Murrin cites the most important studies, principally by authors not especially concerned with the history of ideas.

[34] For a useful discussion of some benefits of the displacement of Hartz's thesis with a republican hypothesis see Dorothy Ross, "The Liberal Tradition Revisited

advised not to claim too much for its explanatory benefits. Like the concept of modernization, to which it seems to bear a resemblance, the rise of liberalism may explain too little if it is called upon to explain too much, too soon.

In the end, I would suggest, it is no longer possible to accept any analysis of the first American party struggle that describes the Republicans and Federalists in terms of left versus right, liberal or progressive versus conservative or reactionary. If revisionary work has taught us anything, it has surely taught us that both parties were a bit of each. Prepared to understand the Jeffersonians as neither unambiguously left nor unequivocably right, I find instructive Appleby's insistence that the desire to free the individual from formal restraints and to use the government to promote access to opportunity were major and essentially progressive elements of the Jeffersonian position, elements inadequately discussed in recent work. At the same time, I resist depiction of Jeffersonian Republicanism as a "flowering of liberal thought" or "a form of capitalism." We cannot simply shut our eyes to the abundant evidence that the Republicans had many reservations about the eager, unrestrained pursuit of economic opportunity and even stronger reservations about the use of government to speed the processes of economic change. Republicans *were* conservative compared to their Hamiltonian opponents *in several important respects*. Appleby is right to stress that they conceived themselves as a progressive force, as the party seeking to defend and perfect a revolutionary new order. In America, however, this new order was commonly defined as one that had escaped or rejected major political, commercial, industrial, and financial changes that had overtaken contemporary England. These novelties the Jeffersonians were determined to resist.[35]

Building on the work of Marvin Meyers and Major Wilson, Daniel Walker Howe has recently described the early nineteenth-century Whigs as neither of the left nor of the right.[36] Whigs were partial modernizers. They were comfortable with, and advocates for, economic changes about which the Jacksonians were anxious, yet they envisioned a process of modernization that would be directed, disciplined, and controlled. They were hesitant about dimensions of modernity and progress that Jacksonians were more inclined to accept: laissez-faire, equality, party competi-

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and the Republican Tradition Addressed," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 116-131.

[35] Even the suggestion that both parties were conservative in some respects and progressive in others risks implying value judgments or assuming a teleological perspective. Like Appleby, I think we should avoid this, but it does seem helpful to point out that the future was hardly on the side of the independent craftsmen and small farmers whose advocates the Jeffersonians were. It was on the side of the entrepreneurial capitalists associated with Alexander Hamilton's Bank of the United States and Society for Useful Manufactures, corporations that were novel in American conditions.

[36] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979).

tion, executive initiatives, secularization, and the like. A comparable analysis of the Federalists and Jeffersonians has yet to be achieved. Its benefits, however, may be hinted by the disagreement between Appleby and other scholars. Its development must draw from both.[37]

This seems to me entirely possible, for—to put a former point another way—the recent reconstructions of Revolutionary republicanism and of Jeffersonian opinion have always recognized and sometimes even emphasized the powerful impact in America of liberal ideas (provided that we do not use too broad a definition of this word). John Locke and Algernon Sidney contributed importantly *both* to the development of a contractual philosophy *and* to the English modification of the classical republican tradition.[38] English oppositionists included theoretical republicans and Protestant dissenters as well as country gentlemen and Tory politicians, whose role may have been unduly stressed of late by both the students of republicanism and their critics. Noting this, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* argued that the eighteenth-century opposition was moving in a democratic direction (or returning to a Harringtonian condemnation of hereditary privilege) well before the American Revolution.[39] Bailyn and Wood both attributed a large part of the transformed and transforming character of Revolutionary thought to the influence of a democratic, individualistic, natural-rights philosophy. Subsequent interpreters have been consistently concerned with the continuing transformation, not simply the persistence,

[37] A more sophisticated interpretation of the first party struggle must also link our growing understanding of party thought with our regrettably scanty information about the social sources of party division. The two most ambitious recent starts toward this are James H. Hutson, "Country, Court, and Constitution: Antifederalism and the Historians," *WMQ*, XXXVIII (1981), 337-368, and Murrin, "Great Inversion," in Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions*, 368-453. Both are valuable and impressive. Neither seems free from difficulties. The Federalists of 1787 included groups and individuals, most notably James Madison, who cannot be associated with a Court tradition. To compare the Federalists to the English Court and Antifederalists to the Country, while revealing, still seems to force materials into the misleading terms of left versus right. We should be careful, too, to avoid a definition of "Court" that would make the term nearly synonymous with pro-government or pro-commercial. Other useful attempts to link the findings of historians of party thought with those of students of party behavior include H. James Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress* (New York, 1974), and Robert Kelley, "Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon," *AHR*, LXXXII (1977), 531-562.

[38] One of the earliest sourcebooks for current understanding of the sources of Revolutionary thinking emphasized the contribution of 18th-century opposition writers to the preservation and transmittal to America of both republican and liberal ideas. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

[39] Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion*, 63-64, 81. John Brewer's *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976) deals more fully with this issue.

of eighteenth-century concepts, a transformation they have always understood as very much a consequence of individualistic and contractual dimensions of Revolutionary thinking. These interpreters need quarrel, not with further study of this transformation or with new attempts to analyze the liberal contribution, but only with arguments that seem to urge retreat to an older, more constricted interpretive perspective, one that might deny much of the newly rediscovered complexity of Revolutionary discourse and imply an easier American adjustment to modernity than the republican hypothesis suggests.

If liberalism connotes adherence to an individualistic and contractual theory of the origins and limits of government, then the Jeffersonians were certainly liberals—which, however, will not help explain how they differed from the Federalists. If liberalism suggests a conception of politics in which the general good will emerge if the state respects the rights of all and individuals attend to little or nothing more than improving their private lives and voting their self-interest, then Republicans (and Federalists) were something less or something more than liberals; most did not consider self-interest a sufficient basis for citizenship, and most did not, as Boorstin would have it, regard the state as existing solely to protect an individual pursuit of private satisfactions.[40] Finally, if liberalism implies unqualified acceptance of acquisitive behavior, "a wholehearted ideology of the market," redefinition of man as *"homo oeconomicus"* rather than *"homo civicus,"*[41] or unequivocal support of an emerging commercial, industrial, and capitalistic order, then it is simply not helpful to describe the Jeffersonians as liberals. Many of their opponents were more nearly comfortable with attitudes such as these.

Jeffersonian Republicans did not oppose business, commerce, manufacturing, or every variety of social change, much less technological or managerial improvements in agriculture and communications. Neither did most of the eighteenth-century oppositionists from whom many of their ideas derived. Both Republicans and oppositionists, however, were sharply aware of the ease with which a spirit of commerce becomes an avaricious desire for private gain and self-immersed enjoyment. Both were convinced that such a spirit, together with the inequality of fortunes that it can promote, is incompatible with preservation of a commonwealth. Both believed agriculturalists to be less subject to the transition from a spirit of virtuous industry to a spirit of avaricious enjoyment than other social groups. Both believed that dangers to virtue and to the moderate level of property-holding that supports it can be accelerated by mercantilism and financialism. While they were not opposed to commerce, they did fear commercialization, which they hoped could be contained and reconciled with traditional values. They distrusted urban crowding and were horrified by the political and social consequences of English industrializa-

[40] Boorstin, *Lost World of Jefferson,* esp. 190-196.

[41] Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *AHR,* LXXXVII (1982), 661-662.

tion. In these ways, and in so far as governmental intervention may actually have been required in order to encourage commercialization and industrialization, they stood against modernity.

In opposing mercantilism and financialism—"unnatural" economic policies and governmental rewards to "parasites"—Jeffersonians were in accord with later liberals. But they did not share the "liberal" desire to unleash the acquisitive spirit, the liberal denial of any tension between private enterprise and public good. Republicans, like nineteenth-century liberals, disapproved of governmental guidance of the economy; but, unlike liberals, they did not aim essentially at using government to nurture the conditions for a general race to get ahead. The Jeffersonians were not Jacksonians. They were still uncomfortable with the thought that uninhibited pursuit of market opportunities would automatically result in public happiness and harmony. They were even more uncomfortable with the notion that the role of the state is to facilitate the growth of capital and credit, hurrying the community into the marketplace. They held that individual improvement ought to be restrained by a residual regard for others, that private satisfactions must sometimes give way to public duties. And they suspected that this commitment to community would be endangered if commerce and manufacturing, which they accepted as the proper, narrow top of the pyramid of economic enterprise, should become too heavy for the pyramid's broad and equal agricultural base.

The irreducible difference between a strictly liberal interpretation of Jeffersonian ideology and a republican hypothesis may lie in our understanding of the way in which the Jeffersonians related the public and private spheres of life. On this point, proponents of the republican thesis can summon valuable assistance from Hannah Arendt. Arendt understood that American Revolutionaries "knew that public freedom consisted in having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else."[42] She shared the Revolutionaries' own sense of the tension between this active—and ultimately still classical—kind of liberty, and privatization. She saw, of course, that Revolutionary republicans desired the liberty to pursue their private welfare and that they sometimes even spoke as though happiness lay exclusively in the private realm. But Arendt saw, as well, that these republicans continued to define "liberty" as much in terms of freedom *to* participate actively and virtuously in politics as in terms of freedom *from* restraint. To them, she wrote,

> Tyranny . . . was a form of government in which the ruler, even though he ruled according to the laws of the realm, had monopolized for himself the right of action, banished the citizens from the public realm into the privacy of their households, and demanded of them that they mind their own, private business. Tyranny, in other words,

[42] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), 115.

deprived of public happiness, though not necessarily of private well-being, while a republic granted to every citizen the right to become "a participator in the government of affairs," the right to be seen in action.[43]

Let us follow Arendt one more step, drawing also both from advocates of the republican hypothesis and from their critics, in order to apply these thoughts to the Jeffersonian Republicans. "The Declaration of Independence," Arendt said, "still intends us to hear the term 'pursuit of happiness' in its twofold meaning: private welfare as well as the right to public happiness, the pursuit of well-being as well as being a 'participator in public affairs.' " Even during the Revolutionary period itself, she suggested—and even within Thomas Jefferson himself, we might add—the classical-republican insistence on liberty in its participatory meaning "came into conflict with ruthless and fundamentally antipolitical desires to be rid of all public cares and duties; to establish a mechanism of government administration through which men could control their rulers and still enjoy" a mode of government that would release them to attend exclusively to their private concerns.[44] The Jeffersonian Republicans undoubtedly attracted many individuals whose concerns were essentially private. It seems certain, as well, that a fundamentally antipolitical spirit encroached increasingly on the participatory ideal in the years after 1789.[45] But the republican hypothesis has shown, I think, that the men who developed a Jeffersonian persuasion and who led the Republican Party into the War of 1812 were still sufficiently classical in their thought that they could not accept the antipolitical spirit as compatible with liberty. Indeed, these Jeffersonians quarreled with the Federalists, in no small part, because so many of the latter wished to banish ordinary people from the public realm.

American Revolutionaries and Jeffersonian Republicans attempted to combine (and probably confused) concepts of liberty deriving from a classical tradition—freedom *to*—with more modern or liberal concepts that associated liberty more exclusively with the private, pre-governmental realm—freedom *from.* Historians can usefully explore resulting tensions and confusions. They should consider whether different social groups and political factions mixed liberal and classical dimensions of their

[43] *Ibid.*, 127. Also helpful on these matters is Trevor Colbourn, ed., *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1974).

[44] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 129, 133.

[45] Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge, 1983), is an interesting, although not entirely successful, consideration of this question. Lewis stresses privatization, especially in the period after 1812, yet it seems clear that the Virginia gentry did not massively withdraw from politics even in these years when nearly all historians would agree that the 18th-century heritage was fading. Lewis also emphasizes a continuing distrust of commerce, insisting that individual opportunity and self-reliance were not embraced but dreaded. See pp. 115-116, 161-165.

heritage in different ways.[46] They will certainly wish to study changes over time. But the question need not be which set of concepts most Jeffersonians ultimately preferred. The Jeffersonians, together with their rivals, may have drawn from a coherent—which is not to say consistent—universe of thought that could contain important elements of both philosophies in a persistent, fruitful tension.[47]

The Jeffersonians were very much concerned with freedom *from* and with replacement of a social and political order grounded on hereditary privilege by an order resting on individual equality and talent. They were not the eighteenth-century British opposition. And yet they never broke entirely free from an eighteenth-century concern with freedom *to,* from a continuing insistence on public duties as well as private rights, or from a humanistic fear of merely economic man. It is, in part, because they never did that "the revolutionary notions of *public* happiness and *political* freedom have never altogether vanished from the American scene." Because of this, their heirs continue to the present to distrust the "antics of a society intent upon affluence and consumption."[48] The Jeffersonian perspective—and even, perhaps, our own—was a product of a Revolutionary republican discourse whose parameters proved stubbornly resistant to complete transcendence.

[46] Eric Foner, whose *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976) was published as I neared completion of *The Jeffersonian Persuasion,* suggests the presence of a distinctive and perhaps more completely liberal variety of Republicanism. Tench Coxe may have represented yet another variety of urban, cosmopolitan Republicanism. See Jacob E. Cooke, *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978). John R. Nelson, Jr., "Alexander Hamilton and American Manufacturing: A Reexamination," *JAH,* LXV (1979), 971-995, is helpful for understanding the popular, urban appeal of Jeffersonian ideology, as, of course, is Appleby. Since 1978, it has become increasingly apparent that Jeffersonian opinion ranged across a broad spectrum. Spokesmen included reactionaries or conservatives such as John Randolph and John Taylor, together with radicals such as Joseph Priestley or Thomas Cooper, English émigrés who were far more acceptive of modernity. (For the range of this spectrum on the issue of a proper military force for a republic, see Cress, *Citizens in Arms,* 155-166.) The presence of such variety, however, does not exclude the possibility of identifying a core of belief that held Jeffersonians together, and I remain willing to argue both that the Republicans were bound together by the concepts explored in *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* and *The Elusive Republic* and that the thought of the great party leaders should be placed somewhere toward the middle of the party's spectrum.

[47] Some of the fruits of this tension are analyzed in Ketcham's *Presidents above Party,* which appeared after this passage was written. Ketcham, who begins by asking why Jefferson should have mentioned Bolingbroke and Thomas Paine in the same sentence as "advocates of human liberty," also offers a very useful discussion of the complementary but distinguishable contributions of Tories and radical Whigs to the opposition response to the "modern Whig" (or Court) tradition of Walpole, Mandeville, and Daniel Defoe. See pp. 3 and 55-57 *passim.*

[48] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 135. Published while the present article was in press, Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View* (Lawrence, Kan., 1984), 84-91, also draws on Arendt for a criticism of the liberal interpretation. But Matthews is almost equally opposed to the republican hypothesis.