INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND SOCIAL CONSENSUS

by Victor Ferkiss

Abstract. The United States today is faced with a crisis of the liberal system stemming from a shortage of resources and ideas. Liberalism assumes that there will always be enough resources to meet all needs and that politics consists of the struggle of interest groups for resources to meet their particular needs. Liberalism is wrong on both counts: there are not enough resources and there is a common good which includes all particular needs properly understood. We must now revise our ideas and institutions in order to make the common good attainable. Various changes in ideas and institutions toward that end are suggested.

The United States today is at a political and moral crossroads. This is not simply a matter of a new administration in power which talks about rejecting the direction of a whole political generation formed by the Great Depression of 1929-40 and having its expression in the New Deal, the welfare state, and the Great Society. The problems are far deeper than the surface currents of partisan politics and economic ideologies. What the nation is faced with is a crisis of the liberal system itself, a crisis brought about by scarcity—scarcity of resources, of money, and/or of ideas. This perception of scarcity challenges the whole basis on which our politics has existed virtually since the birth of the republic.[1] The Reagan administration of course denies the existence of the scarcity crisis and only time will tell whether it is correct in this attitude. We shall proceed on the assumption that it is wrong.

The Meaning of Liberalism

Let me begin by defining what I understand by liberalism. Liberalism is a system of politics which starts from the assumption that nature has provided more than enough for the human race as a whole to live

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with material propserity, and assumes that the best way to exploit and utilize these riches is through the virtually unchecked competition of private interests. Liberalism's philosophical founders are many. Some have traced its ancestry back to Thomas Hobbes, but perhaps the central figure, at least for Americans, is John Locke, who inspired not only the modern capitalist ethos in the English-speaking world but the American constitutional system as well.[2] In the liberal scheme of things politics is the struggle of contending groups for the division of the product of nature, in so far as government and its actions affect the creation and distribution of that product. This struggle assumes that ultimately each person or group is the best final judge of what is in its interest and that these interests are basically at war with each other. Politics, like economics, is a zero sum game in which one party can gain only at the price of a loss incurred by another party.[3] In such a system, if there is any such thing as the common or public interest, it can only be as the sum of all particular interests created by some marvellous mechanism which denies the basic premises of the system. For liberals the role of government is above all that of umpire, a force holding the reins while the contending parties struggle with each other over the goods which society and nature can provide. Although liberal doctrine differs on particulars, the only positive role of government in society is to maintain the rules of fair combat—to do such things as are necessary to the continuation of the competitive struggle, such as preventing private coercion and fraud, and possibly to provide such factors as could not normally arise out of the struggle of private interests: public works of certain kinds, national defense, and various social infrastructures.[4]

Most, especially those in the United States, who hear liberalism so described will find my usage strange. This is so for two reasons. One is that for most Americans liberalism includes a strong strain of opposition to various forms of social coercion such as religious establishment and/or persecution, and artistic censorship. Indeed such opposition was manifested in the early struggles of the bourgeoisie against the old regime in much of the Western world. But more importantly, in economic terms most Americans have come to associate liberalism with strong positive government, on the model of Franklin D. Roosevelt or Lyndon B. Johnson. This is a parochial and historically inaccurate way of looking at things, although it does reflect certain ways in which the meaning of the term has changed in twentieth-century America. Essentially, and on a global basis, liberalism has an historic meaning which is as I have described it, and much of the confusion arises from the fact that the fundamental institutions of American political and economic life have always been liberal, so that the term conservative was easily appropriated by those who wished simply to maintain the traditional liberal status quo.

This confusion of terminology has done much to obscure and skew the process of political discourse in the United States in this century, so much so that many of those who consider themselves authentic liberals on the historical British or Continental model have been forced to refer to themselves as "libertarians" or even "old Whigs," in order to distinguish themselves from those who call themselves liberals but are—in the view of the real inheritors of that mantle—simply socialists in disguise, and as well from true conservatives who resist change for the sake of the old ways and are hostile to the freewheeling competition of economic groups and of ideas which authentic liberalism upholds.[5]

This exercise in semantics is not presented here for its own sake; it is a necessary prelude to addressing the major crises of the day. However it may at first blush seem simply an exercise in irrelevant scholarship or everyday nit-picking. The reason for this is, as stated above, that the liberal creed underlies not only the basic American political value system but also our basic American political institutional structure as well. This remains true even in the twentieth century when majoritarian democracy has changed the appearance (if not always the reality) of certain elements of the original constitutional dispensation. American government today is above all a struggle among special interest groups, barely mediated by a bureaucracy, which stands not so much above them but is part of the battlefield itself, indeed which numbers among its members far more warriors then umpires. Every interest group in our society—businessmen of all levels and specialized interests, laborers, farmers, the civil service itself considered as a special interest group, pensioners, and veterans—each has a role to play in the struggle through constituency organizations, pressure groups, professional lobbyists, specialized committees of legislative bodies, and last but not least, administrative agencies dedicated to its interests. As an editor of the *Washington Post* has put it, "This is Washington—not a government but a sprawling marketplace."[6] The struggle over cutting back the federal budget in early 1981 was a vivid indication of the extent to which our politics has become fragmented and is simply the resultant of the varying strengths of the combatants.

The Problem of Liberalism

Now the existence and strength of these forces, which if anything has been a growing phenomenon over the centuries of our national history—growing in sophistication if not in actual force—was one problem in the past. As long as we were an expanding nation, taming the continent and making claims upon the resources of other nations (as long as we could sustain those claims by military force or hard international bargaining), each of these special interests could be

served in turn. A rising tide lifts all boats. In a period of increasing growth it was possible to give something to each of the contending forces, at least to all which were considered legitimate players in the game. That is not to say that some did not do better than others—sometimes very much better—over either the short or the long run, but no one was completely left out, especially after the advent of the New Deal and the Great Society, and the inclusion in the political process of the poor, the aged, women, and minorities of various kinds. But the costs of this universal inclusion were very high. One cost was the spoiling of our natural resources: growth of the kind I have described was accompanied by drawing down on fixed and ultimately finite stocks of minerals, forests, water, and even space, and consequently polluting and ravaging landscapes.[7]

Yet another cost was inflation. Despite all the economists who would argue that inflation is basically a fiscal problem, the result of government spending too much and/or printing too much money, the fundamental causes of inflation ultimately lie elsewhere. They lie not only in low productivity and low reinvestment, but also in our unwillingness to pay as we go, which has been acerbated by our credit system and by President Johnson's trying to fight the war in Vietnam without disturbing domestic living standards. They lie also in the rising cost of energy supplies, both domestic and above all imported, and in the fact that since we came into existence as a nation we have been living beyond our means. Now the costs of extracting more resources from the earth are beginning to increase as the law of diminishing returns is illustrated on a grand scale. The only conclusion that can be drawn from all this—and it should be noted that this is also the conclusion drawn by those who view inflation in narrow fiscal terms—is that something has to give, which is another way of saying that all groups in the society will have to lessen their claims on the total social product.

That is a hard doctrine to present to a nation that over its history has increasingly operated on the premise that all claims on the social whole could at least be minimally satisfied—and especially at a time when it seems clear that many groups do not yet fully share in the national pie. It is an even harder doctrine to put into practice in a political system structured so as to give special power and priority to the claims of special interests.[8] If the problem is as I have stated it, that our crisis is ultimately traceable to the liberal belief that all groups should compete for the resources of society as strongly as they can, and if the success of all groups is no longer possible because there is simply not enough to go around—even given only a minimal satisfaction of claims—then it follows that a twofold revolution is necessary. We must change our operating ideals, that is, abandon our existing

political and economic philosophies, and we must also drastically restructure our political institutions so as to make this changed philosophy operational.

Prolegomenon to a Solution

Let us turn to looking at the solutions to our problems. One family of solutions is simply to abandon, however reluctantly, our most cherished free institutions and reconcile ourselves to strong, authoritarian government. This is the lesson drawn from present discontents and their projection into the future by the distinguished economist Robert L. Heilbroner. Heilbroner has been arguing for several years that the combination of pollution pressures, shortages of raw materials, and the threat of atomic warfare and nuclear terrorism will require all nations to embrace a form of government that places a premium upon centralized, efficient, and unquestionable authority to maintain order, control pollution, and ration scarce raw materials. He says that he himself does not view this kind of future with anything but dread, but if it comes into existence slowly enough—as he believes it will—the world might get used to it. It would be a future in which there was little room for innovation of any kind—social or technological—because of the tightness of the boundaries of permissible action, given the problems to be faced. He refers to it metaphorically as military or monastic socialism, and the example of it among contemporary political systems is Communist China, at least before the recent reversals of Maoist orthodoxy.[9]

My own proposals are somewhat more optimistic than those of persons like Heilbroner. They are also much more modest in some ways, though in others far more radical, especially in their theoretical dimensions. Before advancing them, however, it is necessary to state at the outset that these proposals assume that it is possible to come to cognitively useful judgments about moral matters. If we continue to accept the all too common convictions—in most cases actually unexamined assumptions—that all statements about political ethics are relative and that truth will always elude us, we are doomed either to helplessness in the face of our problems or to going ahead with solutions even if we do not have the conviction that they are demonstrably correct. The latter option leads to a great and, as history proves, usually irresistable temptation to use force to have our way.[10]

Let us begin on the level of ideas then, remembering always that ideas and actions and institutions constitute a seamless web of social dynamics. First, we must reassert the primacy of community over against the corrosive philosophy of complete individualism. Community is a political value much denigrated by liberalism and its philosophers, whose attitude has permeated most of the academic world. Yet

the ordinary person—despite centuries of propaganda by the learned and their ilk—has largely retained his fundamental belief in the values of community. It has sometimes been argued that the essentially liberal political and economic institutions of the modern Western world, especially the United States, could not endure were it not—paradoxically—for this substratum of popular belief in group norms and in a society which perdures and provides the arena for the struggle of interest groups of various kinds.[11] A community, simply stated, is any group of persons who sense that the connections which bind them together and which define their existence are more important than any differences among them. The most simple type of community is the family, but the concept can be extended upward and outward to include the local community and whole nations.[12] Being a member of a community implies that there are interests which the community shares and which are the interests of the individual members as well.

The concept of community, as stated, implies another political concept which must also be revived—which necessarily will revive if community is given its proper due—the concept of the common good. The common good consists of things, events, or states of affairs that are desirable to or valued in common by all members of the community simply by virtue of their membership and that can only be enjoyed in common, such as peace and order. There are many resemblances between the concept of the common good and that of the public interest but there are subtle differences as well, and much can be learned about the direction of public discussion from which terminology prevails at any given time.[13] The concept of the public interest derives from the seventeenth-century debates over individual interests and is meaningful primarily in the context of societies which accept those theories. Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, the common good is the older one. The modern French political philosopher Bertrand de Jouvenel in effect identifies the common good with assuming the existence of a community, which he argues is a matter of common sense. France is obviously such, "avoiding destruction by some hostile grouping, of wasting away by the dissolution of emotional ties."[14] Acceptance of the possible existence of common good leads to the possibility of justice, which is above all a disposition of the will.[15] It is the very process of government in a democratic society which constitutes its common good far more so than any particular substantive outcomes of that process. Further, the common good can (following the ideas of the late Yves R. Simon) be identified with the life of the community itself, not with any particular policy or goal.[16] But some policies and goals lead to the dissolution of the community; therefore, they are not conducive to the common

good. Destruction in war, ecological dissolution, and the breaking of the bonds of community and their replacement by rampant individualism—all of these must be avoided for the sake of the common good. If, as the late Robert M. Hutchins held, "Politics is the science of the Common Good,"[17] then the prevention of such outcomes must be the first task of political science.

Closely related to the question of the common good, the good of a community, is how freedom is defined. There are many definitions of freedom, but most of them can be divided into two great families: theories of freedom that stress the power to do something and theories that stress absence of constraint from human forces outside the actor.[18] Sometimes this difference is expressed as one between freedom from and freedom to. The essence of liberalism is its insistence that freedom consists of the absence of intrahuman coercion (freedom from), as first expressed in the modern tradition by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan*.[19] This definition ignores the extent to which it makes better sense to think of freedom as the ability to choose among futures, which implies the power to effectuate one's will. Theories of positive freedom, as this view is often denominated, can of course easily be abused, but the converse is also true.[20] The freedom to do something that one does not have the simple ability to do is useless for most persons, and it fails to take into account the grave inequalities which necessarily exist among human beings and the frustration of human beings at the recalcitrance of physical nature. When Anatole France said that under the laws of France the rich and the poor were equally free to sleep under bridges at night, he was saying something important. If we define freedom in a positive rather than a negative fashion, we can more easily grasp how it might be extended rather than diminished by a government based on a community consensus aiming at the common good.

Reconciling Individual Needs with a Societal Consensus

Having laid the groundwork, it is now in order to look directly at our topic: how can individual needs be reconciled with a societal consensus? The first problem lies in the definition of needs. It has been argued by many, especially in recent years, that it is possible to define human needs in an objective manner and from that definition to proceed to a theory of politics which validates regimes in part by how well they succeed in satisfying such needs. There exists a vast and burgeoning literature—philosophical, moral, and scientific—which attempts to catalogue and explicate human needs at various levels. There is no question that human beings, as animals, have certain basic physical needs. We all require a minimum amount of food and, above all, water (one will die of thirst long before dying of hunger). We all

also need clothing to protect us from the elements in most climates, and shelter as well. In addition to these basic physical needs some have recently postulated a schedule of psychic needs. They have been led by the psychologist Abraham Maslow, who has set up a hierarchy in which the higher needs are satisfied only after basic physical needs have been attended to.[21] Yet, it can be objected that such a formulation ignores the tremendous variety of ways in which basic needs can be satisfied, even the higher needs of which Maslow and his fellow humanistic psychologists write. In actual fact it may be that the satisfaction of human needs is socially conditioned. Many tribes will starve rather than change their diets and eat unfamiliar grains. Many modern westerners would not last long on a diet of insects as some primitive people do. Needs and their satisfaction are mediated through culture and social institutions. Also, there may be better and worse ways of satisfying them. Indeed, the symbolic aspects may be far more important than the more basic physical and even psychological aspects.[22] If this is the case our attention should be focused on the symbolic aspects, the social contexts in which needs are satisfied rather than upon the needs themselves.

Such an approach is perilous of course.[23] For it lays us open in various ways to manipulation by the political society, which can substitute symbol for reality, as some would argue advertising already does in the economy. Advertisers, as well as political leaders from time immemorial, have learned to substitute symbols for reality. Thereby they induce people to buy products or support leaders because these are associated with symbols which are valued. The sexy looking model, male or female, used to sell cigarettes is no different in this respect than the home and mother associated (at least up until recently) with successful American political candidates. But it also can be argued that taken as symbols needs are essentially insatiable, and that only by means of a conscious self-manipulation can we bring to an end the process in which, by seeking to satisfy symbolic needs by consumption, we continually emphasize economic growth with its consequent stress upon the environment. An example of such a process of symbolic self-manipulation would be the intentional adoption of a frugal life style because it is more ideologically appealing than one of increasing consumption, although from a hedonistic point of view both are potentially equal once adopted in terms of making us happy.

The issue is not simply a semantic one. For the concept of needs is close to that of wants: indeed wants are essentially only the subjective perception of apparent needs. From the schedule of wants, which each of us perceives, derives the concept of interests.[24] Interest groups in society are groups of people who are making common claims on the society for the satisfaction of wants, whether or not these wants consti-

tute higher prices for the oil industry or larger and more brightly colored postage stamps. Insofar as we pass the point at which a given society has satisfied all of our absolute, rock-bottom needs for food, clothing, and shelter, what we are talking about is a society that is engaged in the struggle over whose symbolic wants shall be satisfied. The problem of need/want satisfaction then is one essentially of perception, of looking at the symbols of want satisfaction in a different way. How we conceive of our interests is ultimately a subjective phenomenon, and the reconciliation of a host of individual or group preferences for different ways of social satisfaction of our needs is one to which we can address ourselves in a rational fashion, although there is of course no guarantee that we shall do so. The problem of the reconciliation of individual needs with those of others is, therefore, political in the best sense of the word; it involves compromise and consensus as well.[25]

Identities, Interests, and Consensus

The basic key to arriving at consensus is agreeing on the proper level of generality (or abstraction) on which to focus our sense of identity. All human beings have identities to which are related human desires and hence interests. The problem of reconciling interests is in a large part, though not of course completely, not one of simply reconciling divergent interests of different individuals or groups on the same plane through compromise (as in the case of capital and labor settling a strike by agreeing on a wage halfway between the positions of each) but one of making different individuals or groups see what their interests really are.

The solution to doing this lies in remembering that we have interests on a number of levels, just as we have multiple identities. We are simultaneously individual members of a community or a work force with local or specialized interests, and we are also in most cases members of particular families. We are all members of social classes, of nations, and of the human race as a whole. What benefits us at one level of identity may hurt us at another. If I seek to have the wages of the police raised because I am a member of the police force, I benefit as such. But by so doing I may be a party to acerbating an inflation which hurts all members of the middle class of which I am also a member.[26] If I burgle my neighbor's house, I may contribute to the general climate of lawlessness, which means that while I am out robbing another my own home may be broken into and my hoard from previous robberies stolen. We are all vaguely aware of such multiple relationships among our various social selves. Our problem as political decision makers is that quite often, indeed usually, the political system presents questions in the form that can best be answered by consulting

our narrower rather than our wider identities. One thing we must do therefore is to try to revamp our political institutions—including the dynamics of campaigning—so that they present questions in the broadest rather than the narrowest terms possible.

The most basic value change of all lies outside of the strictly political realm in the usual narrow usage. It is one of deciding that the common good requires us to give up the attempt to "conquer" nature and to accept the necessity of living in harmony with it, not taking over any long run of time more resources than can be renewed and not placing heavier burdens of pollution upon the physical environment than can be absorbed by it.[27] In short, we must create a "conserver society"[28] to replace the vandal society spawned by liberalism. We must create a society based ultimately on identifying ourselves as members not of a particular generation but of a species with roots in the past and hopes for the future as well. However, the prerequisite of this overall value change lies in the changes in political values already outlined above.

If we operate from the premise that the political process is the central common good of the political system, it is not difficult to move to the additional proposition that the preservation of the environment is the central substantive common good of society, parallel to process in politics. In this context it is of course necessary to remember that the environment is not simply physical but human and social as well, although they are closely intermeshed and interactive. Slums are an affront not only to public health but to mental health, oppression and tyranny are obstacles to human self-realization as much as is the destruction of wilderness.

Reshaping our Political Institutions

Having said all this, how can we conceive of a new system of political institutions which will reflect the new—or so old they appear as new—political values we have called for? How can and should we reshape our political institutions?

One family of suggestions relies heavily on the courts. The argument of proponents of what is sometimes called "judicial democracy" is that in a constitutional republic such as the United States, where there exist political values which are supposed to be beyond the reach of transient majorities, it is to the judiciary, above all to the United States Supreme Court, that we must look for the protection of these values. Especially is this true, the argument runs, for those enshrined in the Bill of Rights, which it is sometimes argued could not be passed today judging by various studies of public opinion. This argument, although it has many plausable defenders such as Theodore Lowi, is in the last analysis not completely persuasive.[29] For one thing, there is a real problem in a democratic society in vesting final political

power—for these are all in the last analysis political issues—in the hands of a small group of men who are not responsible to the normal processes of representative government, men who can continue for life to do as they wish with no need to take heed of the will of the electorate.[30] Even if in fact the Supreme Court reads the election returns, as was claimed during the 1930s when the court essentially reversed itself on several occasions to approve New Deal legislation, the time lag can be dangerous. At some point we must trust the people as a whole to be aware of what is going on. Second, there is no guarantee that the members of the court at any given point in time will reflect the values which we consider to be paramount. Most of the thrust of the movement for juridical democracy comes from those who assume that the court will reflect their values as it has reflected the values of the American liberal (in the usual usage) since the New Deal era. But if one harks back to the nineteenth century, when the court sought to place in the constitution a doctrine of substantive due process and fought hard to maintain the domination of American life by a privileged upper class of wealth and social status, one can see that there is no guarantee that the court at any future date will uphold any particular sets of values which we might cherish, including protection of the environment. The logic of the constitution it is pledged to uphold is strongly influenced by the individualist biases of classical American liberalism. In the last analysis arguments over the place of the court in American government are like arguments over the relationship between the federal government and the states.[31] They turn largely on questions of which agency of government is doing what we wish it to do substantively, not on questions of what powers the constitution has given or should give to various branches of government. For the new system of values to be secure, it must be embodied in institutions responsive to the popular will and involving the participation of many individuals.

If one assumes that a major role in changing the way we do things must be played by setting questions in the largest possible focus, then it can be argued logically that what the United States needs is a revival of de facto political parties. According to this argument, only something like political parties can aggregate interests (combine and meld them) and frame and carry out coherent legislative programs.[32] Unlike many foreign countries the United States has never had a system of primarily ideological parties. The absence of such parties, a condition which long antedates the recent "reforms" which have done so much to weaken "party discipline" and coherent government, has given rise to many single-interest groups and organizations such as political action committees ranging from lobbies for the oil industry to antiabortionists and the "Moral Majority." These are able to mobilize

votes and money in party primaries and general elections in order to elect candidates favorable to their causes and interests regardless of party. It is true that insofar as these groups take the place of parties and weaken them they appear to make the process of orderly progression from the articulation of interests to their embodiment in law and policy more disorderly. But it must also be remembered that insofar as the political process is really a system—an analogue of the ecological balance of nature—a coherent totality can emerge from the conflict of many uncoordinated forces. The major danger is not primarily the fragmentation of politics that such political groups create, it is the possibility that elements of the common good, especially the preservation of the basic fabric of nature upon which the total society rests, can come to be viewed the same as other special interests, which have constituencies that must (sometimes at least) be placated to some extent but cannot represent the totality. A lobby for the totality is not, however, a contradiction in terms. Perhaps events may arise which make it advisable that proponents of new values seek to capture existing parties or create new ones rather than work through a coalition of decentralized grassroots movements. But the choice is not one that can be made *a priori* on theoretical grounds. It will have to emerge out of the flow of political and social change.

Parallel to the question of whether strengthening the party system is necessary to attain the common good is the question of coherence within governmental structures. Should legislative bodies be given greater control over the activities of special subject matter committees? Here the answer is more likely to be affirmative, although many of the same caveats must be expressed. On the tactical level individual committees and subcommittees may be controlled by legislators with special understanding of the basic problems of the nation whom one might not wish to dislodge from power. But overall in a strategic sense it would appear that what is necessary is a degree of coordination that only can be achieved if a sense of the whole triumphs. In an age of scarcity where questions of marginal utility come more and more to the fore, it will be necessary to consider larger questions as such rather than in a piecemeal fashion as at present, and the authority of the whole Congress must be made superior to that of committees which are largely the preserve of special interests. Since in the last analysis each member of congress, including the key committee members, is elected by a single district's voters, there is no way that the average citizen can make his or her desires felt save if the whole triumphs over the parts.

However, what has been said above must be considered in light of the general problem of centralization versus decentralization of which policy coherence is a special case.[33] This problem is often miscon-

ceived in our society because of our tendency to think of it in terms of an obsolete Newtonian view of the physical universe. In this view it is easy to look upon society and government as analogous to the physical universe, as it was for the founding fathers of the age of Locke, complete with a language that made sharp distinctions between subject and object, the actor and the acted upon, and used transitive verbs as a matter of course. We have learned since that the universe is far more subtle.[34] But we still retain images of politics derived from an earlier era, and we often think of government as a "machine" in which the important issue becomes one of who is in the driver's seat. Actually government, like society itself, is less a machine than a living organism, with a complex system of actors and with balances that keep it stable and enable it to move in various directions without any single guiding hand, more like a modern jazz combination than a classical symphony orchestra, more like soccer or ice hockey than pro baseball or pro football. Not only is centralization possible but so is a decentralization that also can be common action toward a common goal, more like a market than a directed economy, more like the ecology of nature than a controlled laboratory experiment. Indeed, it is probably by such decentralized but mutually reinforcing action that any major redemptive social change can take place. Just as the market system in economics and the ecological system in the physical and biological universe maintain coherence and balance as the result of many spontaneous actions by many actors unknown to each other, so also can government accomplish many major common tasks as a result of the actions of a multitude of individuals and local institutions acting in cooperation (even if sometimes antagonistic cooperation) and even sometimes in what appears from the inside to be actual competition.[35]

Actually the particular institutional mechanisms will be of less importance than a basic change in our political system that will give greater roles to leadership and to authority. Leadership is something that people—including Americans—naturally hunger for, even though they sometimes seem to deny this in word and/or deed.[36] In order to operate people must live in a world where they can act on the basis of stable expectations of what the future will hold; they want to have the feeling that, even if they personally may be bewildered, someone or something is in charge. All public opinion polls have always shown, and common impressionistic observation indicates, that any American ruler has the benefit of the doubt, especially in times of national crisis, real or perceived. Ordinary citizens indeed want him to succeed so that they can go on about their private business without worrying too much about the state of the nation as a whole. This margin for decisive action is a margin for the exercise of leadership, which must be skilled at compromise as well as bold in aim. The

natural leader in the American political system is and only can be the president of course, who alone (with, needless to add, the vice-president) is nominated by one of the two great national political parties and elected by the vote—albeit indirectly—of all the people. He or she alone can call to arms the various special interests within the party, the congress, and the nation as a whole and try to move them toward common goals. The presidency is still as Theodore Roosevelt once called it, a "right bully pulpit," and it can still be used to inspire the nation toward common action. Despite recent scandals such as Watergate the presidency still enjoys a reservoir—apparently a growing one—of public trust, there being no other person or institution to which the trust can be given.[37]

But to merit such trust and to use it effectively, the president must speak with authority.[38] That is to say he must be perceived as enunciating the common conviction of the members of the political community and focusing them on particular problems. And to have authority he must be perceived as legitimately the head of a political system which itself has legitimacy.[39] Authority is not only inseparable from legitimacy; it is also inseparable from leadership, which is in turn inseparable from common convictions about values which constitute community. Insofar as we are a community it is in the long run on the basis of shared convictions, while insofar as the president has authority it is as the spokesman for these common values. The web of relationships among these various variables is such that if one begins to fail the others soon follow. Loss of leadership means diminution of authority; loss of common values implies diminution of community. By the same token they have to be constituted together; one leads to another. But whatever the special problems and uncertainties, steps must be taken to achieve all of the necessary institutional reforms if the substantive common good is to be politically achievable.

Obviously the United States is not alone in the world. Our ability to deal with any of our economic and/or environmental problems is contingent upon what happens elsewhere in the world. Our problems are part of a larger pattern, one which can only be dealt with on a global basis. This is not the occasion to attempt to discuss the global implications of any of these issues. But it cannot be ignored that they are global in nature and that environmental futures depend not simply on what happens in one nation alone. Neither can we solve our problems in isolation, however tempting that might appear, nor can we solve our environmental problems outside of a world in which we have solved the problem of imminent nuclear holocast. Peace and environmental balance are inseparable. But we have to start somewhere, and even if there is a global common good we must approach it first on a national basis.[40]

The task before us then is as difficult as it is complex. We must simultaneously rethink our conception of the relationship of individual needs to common ends as dictated more and more by the era of scarcity, rebuild our institutions so as to enable these ideas to bear fruit in public policy, and reconstitute effective government, leadership, and authority. To fail in any one of these tasks is probably to fail in all of them. To triumph in the totality of tasks, however, is to make possible a new birth of freedom and social order in a troubled nation and world.

NOTES

1. On scarcity generally see Paul and Anne Ehrlich, *Population: Resources: Environment* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1970); and Donella H. Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). See also Lester Brown, *World Without Borders* (New York: Random House, 1972); Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos, *Only One Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972); and Allan Schnaiberg, *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). For opposing points of view see Melvin Grayson and Shepard Thomas, *The Disaster Lobby* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973); John Maddox, *The Doomsday Syndrome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); and especially H. S. D. Cole et al., *Models of Doom: A Critique of the Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1973). On possible social consequences of scarcity see Paul Blumberg, *Inequality in an Age of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Robert Fuller, *Inflation: The Rising Cost of Living on a Small Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, 1980); Richard Barnet, *The Lean Years: Politics in the Age of Scarcity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980). See also Bruce M. Shefrin, *The Future of U.S. Politics in an Age of Economic Limits* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980). On the problem of money shortage see James Chace, *Solvency: The Problem of Survival* (New York: Random House, 1981).

2. On Hobbes as the real founder of liberalism see David Minar, *Ideas and Politics* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1964), p. 43; and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., "Disguised Liberalism," *Public Policy* 18 (1970): 621. On Locke see C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Philosophy of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 202-51; Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), pp. 433-68; and Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 286-351. For a different interpretation of Locke's ideas see Martin Seliger, *The Liberal Politics of John Locke* (New York: Praeger, 1969). There is even a small revisionist school that argues against Locke's primacy in inspiring American ideals, for which see Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1978). For the conventional view see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955).

3. See Lester Thurow, *The Zero Sum Society: Distribution and the Possibilities of Economic Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

4. On liberalism see William A. Orton, *The Liberal Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1945); Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); Frederick W. Watkins, *The Political Tradition of the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948); John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 28-54. On American liberalism see Harry Girvetz, *From Wealth to Welfare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1950); and Hartz (n. 2 above). On the problem of defining liberalism in the American context see Kenneth M. Dolbeare, *Directions in American Political Thought* (New York: John Wiley, 1969), pp. 15-25. Gary Wills describes Richard Nixon as a classical liberal in his *Nixon Agonistes* (New York: Signet Books, 1971).

5. Thus the Nobel prize-winning economist F. A. Hayek, sometimes erroneously referred to as conservative, writes, "The more I learn about the evolution of ideas, the more I have become aware that I am simply an unrepentent Old Whig—with the stress on the 'old'!" Postscript, "Why I am Not a Conservative," to *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 409.

6. William Greider, "Welcome to the Marketplace that is Washington, Mr. President. . . ." *Washington Post*, January 20, 1981. This was a reprint of an article which first appeared on January 20, 1977, with only the name of the president changed.

7. See Scott Paradise, "The Vandal Ideology," *The Nation* 209 (1969): 729.

8. A note on usage. Many social philosophers would of course deny that the adjective "special" adds anything to the concept of interest, since all interests are by definition special, there being no such thing as a general interest. That is a question the answer to which can only emerge from a discussion of the nature of the good society as such, an answer which is implicit in this whole paper.

9. See Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect—Updated and Reconsidered for the 1980s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).

10. On relativism generally see A. D. Nelson, "Ethical Relativism and the Study of Political Values," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 11 (1978): 3-32. Nelson holds, and I would agree, that the relativist doctrine "is quite problematical, especially from an empirical and experiential standpoint" (p. 31). See also J. Donald Moon, "Values and Political Theory: A Modest Defense of a Qualified Cognitivism," *The Journal of Politics* 39 (1977): 877-903; Walter B. Mean, "A Call for Conceptual Clarification in Value Theory: A Response to Prof. Moon." ibid, pp. 904-12; and Moon, "Response to Prof. Mead," ibid., pp. 913-15. I recognize of course that conviction as well as lack of conviction can lead to intolerance.

11. On the need for a substratum of society see Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1949), pp. 715-17. On community in America see Willmoore Kendell and George Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

12. On community see Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Nomos II: Community* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959). For a critical view of the concept see Raymond Plant, "Community: Concept, Conception and Ideology," *Politics and Society* 8 (1978): 79-107.

13. See Bruce Douglass, "The Common Good and the Public Interest," *Political Theory* 9 (1980): 103-17.

14. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good*, trans. J. F. Huntington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 129.

15. Ibid., p. 165.

16. Claude E. Cochran, "Yves R. Simon and 'The Common Good': A Note on the Concept," *Ethics* 88 (1978): 237.

17. Quoted in Mortimer J. Adler, *The Common Sense of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 7. On the common good generally see Victor Ferkiss, *The Future of Technological Civilization* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), pp. 186-205.

18. See Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). See also Ralph Pettman, *Biopolitics and International Values: Investigating Liberal Norms* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), pp. 100-6.

19. "LIBERTY, or FREEDOME, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition. . . . But when the impediment of motion, is in the constitution of one thing it selfe, we use not to say, it wants the Liberty; but the Power to move; as when a stone lyeth still, or a man is fastened to his bed by sickness." *Leviathan* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914), p. 110.

20. On positive freedom see Victor Ferkiss, "Creating Chosen Futures: The New Meaning of Freedom in America's Third Century," in Norman A. Graebner, ed., *Freedom in America: A 200-Year Perspective* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 249-64. See also Peter J. Stillman, "Freedom in Participation: The Revolutionary Theories of Hegel and Arendt," *American Behavioral Scientist* 20 (1977): 477-92. Voltaire defined freedom thus "to be truly free is to have power to do. When I can do what I want to do, there is my liberty for me." Quoted in de Jouvenel (n. 14 above), p. 248. Hume wrote "By liberty, then we can only, mean a *power of acting or not acting, according to a determination of the will.*" Quoted in Hayek (n. 5 above), p. 439. See

also Frank H. Knight, "Discussion: The Meaning of Freedom," *Ethics* 52 (1941-42): ca. 93.

21. On human needs see Ferkiss, *Future of Technological Civilization*, pp. 165-85. See also James C. Davies, *Human Nature in Politics* (New York: John Wiley, 1963). For Abraham Maslow's ideas see his *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968). See also Christian Bay, "Needs, Wants and Political Legitimacy," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1 (1968): 241-60, and Stanley Leese, "Human Needs: The Conditioning Factors," *Futures* 8 (1976): 531-37. See also Ramashray Roy, "Human Needs and Freedom: Three Contrasting Perceptions and Perspectives," *Alternatives: A Journal of World Policy* 5 (1979-80): 195-212.

22. This point is brilliantly developed in an ecological context in William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

23. See Robert E. Goodwin, "Symbolic Rewards: Being Bought off Cheaply," *Political Studies* 25 (1979): 383-96.

24. On the concept of interests see Carl Friedrich, ed., *Nomos 5: The Public Interest* (New York: Atherton Press, 1962); Robert Paul Wolff, *The End of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 162-95; S. I. Benn, "Interest in Politics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60 (1960): 128; Theodore Bendett, "The Concept of Interest in Political Theory," *Political Theory* 3 (1975): 245-58; Christine Swanton, "The Concept of Interests," *Political Theory* 8 (1980): 83-102; Grenville Wall, "The Concept of Interest in Politics," *Politics and Society* 5 (1975): 487-510; and Brian Barry, "The Public Interest" in *Political Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Quinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 112-28. Note also Walter Lippmann's classic definition of the public interest: "what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, acted disinterestedly and benevolently," *The Public Philosophy* (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), p. 40. See also William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1974), pp. 45-83; Richard Flathman, *The Public Interest* (New York: John Wiley, 1966); Isaac Balbus, "The Concept of Interest in Pluralist and Marxist Analysis," *Politics and Society* 1 (1971): 151-78; Clarke E. Cochran, "Political Science and The Public Interest," *Journal of Politics* 36 (1974): 327-55; and Brian Barry, "The Public Interest," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement* 38 (1964): 1-18.

25. On the problems of consensus in contemporary America, see Stephen R. Graubard, ed., "The End of Consensus?" a special issue of *Daedalus* 109 (Summer 1980).

26. See James Q. Wilson, "The Riddle of the Middle Class," *The Public Interest* 39 (Spring 1975): 125-29.

27. For a dissent from a "liberal" point of view see Hayek (n. 5 above), p. 372.

28. On conservation from a political theory standpoint see Channing Kury, "Prolegomena to Conservation: A Fisheye View," *Natural Resources Journal* 17 (1977): 493-509. See also R. Kenneth Godwin and W. Bruce Shepard, "Forcing Squares, Triangles and Ellipses into a Circular Paradigm: The Use of the Commons Dilemma in Examining the Allocation of Common Resources," *Western Political Quarterly* 32 (1979): 265-77, which argues that the thesis of Garrett Hardin is much too simplified. See also Richard L. Meier, "Preservation: Planning for the Survival of Things," *Futures* 12 (1980): 128-41; and Kimon Valaskis et al., *The Conserver Society: A Workable Alternative for the Future* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

29. See Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). See also Robert C. Grady, "Interest-Group Liberalism and Juridical Democracy: Two Theses in Search of Legitimation," *American Politics Quarterly* 6 (1978): 213-33.

30. "For the ultimate cost of judicial policy-making is that judges are essentially irresponsible," writes Martin Shapiro in "Judicial Activism" in *The Third Century: America as a Post-Industrial Society*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 129.

31. Actually a good argument can be made on principle that smaller units of government are preferable in that they permit greater individual impact on decisions. See Andrew Greeley, *No Bigger Than Necessary: An Alternative to Socialism, Capitalism and Anarchism* (New York: New American Library, 1977).

32. The perennial issue of the desirable role for strong parties in the American political system is discussed in E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1942); Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., "The American Party System Today" in Lipset, pp. 153-82; Bruce A. Campbell and Richard J. Trilling, eds., *Realignment in American Politics: Towards a Theory* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); John Herbers, "The Party's Over for the Political Parties," *The New York Times Magazine* (December 9, 1979): 158-82; and Michael T. Hayes, "The Semi-Sovereign Pressure Group: A Critique of Current Theory and an Alternative Typology," *The Journal of Politics* 40 (1978): 134-61. On the relationship of such problems to environmentalism specifically see Frederich H. Buttel and William L. Flinn, "Environmental Politics: The Structures of Partisan and Ideological Cleavage in Mass Environmental Attitudes," *Sociological Quarterly* 17 (1976): 447-90.

33. On centralization and decentralization in contemporary politics see Daniel J. Elezar, "Constitutionalism, Federalism and the Post-Industrial American Policy," in Lipset, pp. 79-107.

34. On new views of nature see Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1975); and Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: William Morrow, 1979).

35. "We can now realistically speak of decentralization and participation within a common framework of macro control." David W. Orr and Stuart Hill, "Leviathan, The Open Society, and the Crisis of Ecology," *Western Political Quarterly* 30 (1978): 468.

36. On problems of contemporary leadership see Robert E. Lane, "Interpersonal Relations and Leadership in a 'Cold Society,'" *Comparative Politics* 10 (1978): 443-59.

37. Two recent books which address the problems of the American presidency, one suggesting constitutional reform as a means of strengthening his position and the other primarily political measures are Charles M. Hardin, *Presidential Power and Accountability: Toward a New Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Godfrey Hodgson, *All Things to All Men: The False Promise of the Modern American Presidency* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980).

38. On authority see Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Nomos I. Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

39. On legitimacy see John H. Herz, "Legitimacy: Can We Retrieve It?" *Comparative Politics* 10 (1978): 317-44.

40. On global aspects of these problems see Ferkiss, "Nature, Technology and Politics in a Global Context," *Zygon* 16 (June 1981): 127-49. See also Bart van Steenbergen and Gordon Feller, "Emerging Lifestyle Movements: Alternative to Overdevelopment?" *Alternatives* 5 (1979): 275-305; Dennis Pirages, ed., "International Politics of Scarcity," special issue of *International Studies Quarterly* 21 (1977): 561-724; and George Kennan, "Cease This Madness," *Atlantic* 247 (January 1981): 25-28.