The Apotheosis of American Democracy

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"Marxism is a religion," wrote the economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942, 5), who used the equation to explain the political ideology's seductive appeal. Schumpeter's insight and argument apply equally well to the ideology of democratic fundamentalism that is manifest in U.S. foreign policy. "To the believer," democratic fundamentalism, like Marxism, "presents, first, a system of ultimate ends that embody the meaning of life and are absolute standards by which to judge events and actions; and, secondly, a guide to those ends which implies a plan of salvation and the indication of the evil from which mankind, or a chosen section of mankind, is to be saved. . . . [It] belongs to that subgroup [of 'isms'] which promises paradise this side of the grave" (Schumpeter 1942, 5). It also is seen to inspire and legitimize terror, torture, and killing on a scale comparable to the mayhem that flowed from the religious fervors of old.

Religious and political fundamentalism are not discretely separate phenomena. Rather, they are of a piece, springing from a common biological process and coadapting across a broad margin. In this essay, I explore the nature and consequences of these two fundamentalist sentiments. I begin by discussing the god-state nexus in historical context and then describe its basis in evolutionary biology. I go on to consider some implications for American culture and republican government.

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God and State

Soulcraft and statecraft have coexisted throughout history. Economists and political theorists view the two realms as partly complementary and partly substitutable forces whose balance at any juncture is determined by a society's aggregate needs, interests, and possibilities, as discovered and acted upon by competing entrepreneurial forces. Societies strike initial balances, which then evolve differently to accommodate changing local circumstances.

In antiquity, notes the historian Charles Freeman with reference to ancient Rome, "[r]eligious practice was closely tied to the public order of the state and with the psychological well-being that comes from the following of ancient rituals. Religious devotion was indistinguishable from one's loyalties to the state, one's city and one's family" (2003, 68). Kings and emperors were regarded as gods, evidently because of their seemingly miraculous (technically, "charismatic") ability to execute grand projects ranging from public works to wars. The advent of Western Christendom expanded the market for distinctly religious practices, bringing about a specialization of labor that transformed soulcraft into a large and profitable industry (Ekelund et al. 1996). Secular leaders lost their quasi-divinity during this era, but they retained public legitimacy through the auspices of presumptively divine blessing. They reciprocated occasionally by imposing stabilizing principles on religious doctrine (Freeman 2003, 178–79). The great, and greatly unfortunate, achievement of soulcraft during this period was to exalt faith above reason, fulfilling the Apostle Paul's commitment to "destroy the wisdom of the wise" (I Corinthians 19, alluding to Isaiah 29:14). The power of faith to inspire human action on a large scale faltered around the middle of the current era's second millennium as revelation succumbed to reason in the public realm. As the nineteenth century closed, many writers, most notably the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, described the West's all-too-human God as dead, and the Western mind reopened. Statecraft by then had displaced soulcraft as the principle coordinating force in public affairs, replacing the social covenants symbolized by the rainbow (trust) and the cross (faith) with a new covenant symbolized by the flag (obedience).

The personal God of religion listened to the private pleas of common individuals and responded (or not) to their prayers. A democratized and otherwise diminished personal God continued in this role following the resurrection of reason. American religion, however, diverged from literary Christianity as local religious practices adapted to the needs and interests of diverse factions within secular society (Bloom 1992). Statecraft moved concurrently into the partially vacated role of religion's personal God. Politicians now listened and responded to the prayers of ordinary constituents. Unlike the personal God of yore, however, they were obliged either to act on those prayers or to explain why they did not.

One consequence of this transformation is that America has become a "post-Christian" nation (Bloom 1992). Another is the *apotheosis* of American democracy itself. American democracy, in other words, has attained de facto religious status.

A small number of perspicacious thinkers have observed the apotheosis phenomenon over several decades. Among them, the sociologist Helmut Schoeck (1966) mildly characterized modern government as an egalitarian deity that acts in response to the petty envies of its citizens. The economist Ludwig von Mises offered a sharper characterization of the modern state, describing its officials as acting from a desire to emulate, if not to *be*, God: "The terms 'society' and 'state' as they are used by the contemporary advocates of socialism, planning, and social control of all the activities of individuals signify a deity. The priests of this new creed ascribe to their idol all those attributes which the theologians ascribe to God—omnipotence, omniscience, infinite goodness, and so on" ([1949] 1996, 151). The public-choice program in economics has refined and extended these insights. The gods described by public-choice do not resemble the benevolent, loving, and compassionate father of Christendom that Mises assumed. They appear instead as venal, petty, vain, and vengeful spirits, like those of the mythic Greek pantheon. Public-choice models characterize democracy as the conjunction of three self-interested factions: a proletariat of rent seekers; an elite decision-making class of panderers, pimps, and whores; and a priestly intermediating class of propitiating lawyers and lobbyists. The behaviors particular to each faction evolve as entrepreneurial individuals discover new combinations of activities that further their private interests.

The behavioral biologist Edward Wilson capsulizes the God-state nexus in a way that every political economist can appreciate: "Religions, like other human institutions, evolve so as to enhance the persistence and influence of their practitioners. Marxism and other secular religions offer little more than promises of material welfare and a legislated escape from the consequences of human nature. They, too, are energized by the goal of collective self-aggrandizement" (1978, 3).

Biology, Religion, and Apotheosized Democracy

Attributing the apotheosis of American democracy solely to economic and political destiny, however, would disregard new and compelling evidence from the emerging field of sociobiology, "the conjunction of biology and the various social sciences" (Wilson 1978, 7).

The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire argued that mankind would invent God if He did not exist. Sociobiology shows how such acts of creation arise spontaneously from the human brain's evolved facility for signaling and orchestrating moral sentiments, in particular those entailing reciprocity, trust, and cooperative behavior. Economists interpret these behaviors as overt aspects of rationality. More precisely, however, they represent a few among many biologically based strategies that have evolved out of countless generations of survival and reproduction. Sociobiology shows that such conventional notions as "natural law," the "invisible hand," and the Golden Rule, long regarded by economists and philosophers as simplifying metaphors, have an objective basis in scientific fact. The instinctive human propensity toward cooperation and reciprocity explains not only the robustness of the market process and the

empirical weakness of "market failure" theories involving public goods (Cowan and Crampton 2002), but also the basis for social norms (Posner 2000), the seductive appeal of Marxism and redistributive democracy, the human passion for celebrities, and the mass media's traditionally neoliberal proclivity.

The biologist Matt Ridley documents at length mankind's biologically based capacity for generating cooperative behavior. He also describes the errant propensity of the brain's "social-exchange organ" to project cooperative scenarios onto situations where cooperation is inapposite:

> We invent social exchange in even the most inappropriate situations. It dominates our relationship with the supernatural, for example. We frequently and universally anthropomorphize the natural world as a system of social exchanges. "The gods are angry because of what we have done" we say to justify a setback in the Trojan war, a plague of locusts in ancient Egypt, a drought in the Namib desert or a piece of bad luck in modern suburbia. . . . If we please the gods—with sacrifices, food offerings, or prayer—we expect to be rewarded with military victory, good harvests or a ticket to heaven. Our steadfast refusal to believe in good or bad luck, but to attribute it to some punishment for a broken promise or reward for a good deed, whether we are religious or not, is idiosyncratic to say the least.
>
> We do not know for sure where the social-exchange organ is, or how it works, but we can tell it is there as surely as we can tell anything else about our brains. (1997, 131)

Previous generations of scholars sought the origins of religion within compulsive neuroses, the need for father figures, the taste for opiates, and the apprehension of death. Sociobiology, in contrast, describes religion as a flukish artifact of the biologically stimulated propensity for cooperation. Economists increasingly look to the evolution of cooperation and reciprocity for insights into the origins of economic behavior. Rubin (2002) surveys and interprets the literature on this subject and relates discoveries in sociobiology to the development of political and legal systems and to religious behaviors that mimic political behavior.

The biological imperative to cooperate and the equally visceral human desire to "do justice" by punishing instances of shirking, reneging, lying, cheating, and hypocrisy explain what conventional economic theory does not: the human propensity for such odd behavior as tipping waiters. They also explain why individuals who decline opportunities to act cooperatively—because of such factors as wealth, might, ego, legal entitlements, and religious ethics—mark themselves as outsiders (one of "them") and so expose themselves to potentially harsh treatment at the hands of cooperatively minded individuals ("us") who instinctively resent being snubbed (Rubin 2002, 31–56).

Genetically linked behavioral effects are pervasive. The sociobiology literature demonstrates that "even in such a prototypically 'cultural' thing as religion, the impact

of genes cannot be ignored and can be measured" (Ridley 2003, 80). Moreover, and seemingly against prediction, the behavioral consequences of genes can be disruptive and potentially detrimental because "the human intellect itself is a product of *sexual* rather than *natural* selection," and "anything that increases reproductive success will spread at the expense of anything that does not—even if it threatens survival" (Ridley 1993, 20–21, italics added). Cooperation and reciprocity are fundamental to reproductive success, so these behaviors unsurprisingly entail some harmful collateral predispositions—"flaws" (my characterization)—that must be mitigated through conscious, rational action.

One such flaw drives the brain's evolved tendency, just described, to project cooperative social-exchange scenarios onto inappropriate situations. It engenders an anthropomorphism that finds cooperative god figures where none exists. A second flaw lies in the evolved instinct for reciprocity. This flaw exposes mankind to "a sort of parasitism of reciprocity. . .[which is] a human invention to exploit our pre-existing natures, our innate respect for generosity and disrespect for those who would not share. And why would we have such an instinct? Because to be known as intolerant of and punitive towards stinginess is an effective way to police a system of reciprocity, *to extort your share of others' good fortune*" (Ridley 1997, 122–24, italics added). This flaw is deleterious when our instinctive drive for reciprocity overshoots cooperative social-exchange limits and becomes predatory. A correlative problem is that predatory desires to share in others' good fortune generate self-deception regarding the nature of the benefits being pursued:

> One implication relevant for political analysis of this self-deception is that humans (acting as individuals or as members of interest groups) wanting special favors from the government can easily convince themselves that these favors are actually in the public interest. They convince themselves that the benefits are not just for the private benefit of the interest group. . . . The implications are that, if we are seeking truth in a scientific sense, we should be very careful about believing anything that is in our own interest. (Rubin 2002, 171)

These evolutionary flaws influence not only our perceptions of fairness and justice (see, for example, Rawls 1999), but also our instinctive and sometimes destructive desire to effect these outcomes through coercion.

The social-exchange instinct that projects human sentiments onto inanimate objects and creates celestial deities out of thin air easily projects spiritual qualities onto charismatic individuals. The sociologist Max Weber adopted the ancient Greek and early Christian idea of *charisma* (literally, "gift of God's grace") to define the ability of some individuals, such as ancient emperors and kings, to inspire reverence and devotion. The term now is used loosely to describe anyone—politicians, movie stars, athletes, and so forth—to whom we are drawn instinctively. Evolution has equipped us to perceive such individuals as ideal partners in cooperation. The attraction to celebrities

per se—that is, to people who are famous primarily for being well known—is an artifact of our flawed social-exchange sense. The attraction to charismatic and potentially cooperative politicians rests on firmer ground. Politicians, in turn, shrewdly, cynically, and perhaps instinctively exploit the "parasitism of reciprocity" effect by listening to voters' wishful imaginations and promising to help them "extort [their 'fair'] share of others' good fortune." They promise, in effect, to improve and perfect a biological process of cooperation and reciprocity that has been evolving since long before humans emerged as a separate species, but they have actually displaced it with the wave of a coercive pen. The result is an apotheosized government that becomes "the chief weapon in a political [and intrinsically 'religious'] war of all against all" (Yeager 2001, 249).

The instinctive biological drive toward cooperation and reciprocity fosters an active desire to discover and to create other similarly oriented individuals and groups with which to interact. Sociobiology teaches that "[o]nce cooperators segregate themselves off from the rest of society a wholly new force of evolution can come into play: one that pits groups against each other, rather than individuals" (Ridley 1997, 147). This phenomenon manifests itself in many ways. It is especially evident in public policies that seek to export local brands of democratic fundamentalism around the globe in order to create similar-minded societies of cooperators with which to deal.

From the human predisposition toward trust, cooperation, and reciprocity, we might predict that we humans would live in the blissfully free state of classical liberalism, but in fact we do not live in this way, despite undeniable progress in this direction. Rubin draws on the logic of natural selection to explain this failure of prediction, arguing that coercive social arrangements must have proved superior during earlier periods of human evolution (2002, 140–51). A simpler explanation, however, flows from insights illuminating the tendency of our social-exchange facility to overshoot beneficial limits by imagining deities, apotheosizing democracy, and fostering parasitisms of reciprocity and cooperation. Mankind's destructive taste for coercively redistributive government is a consequence not necessarily of survival pressures, but more likely of behavioral flaws related to reproductive success.

Biology, Apotheosis, and Philosophy

Ridley characterizes the brain's social-exchange organ as "a ruthless and devastatingly focused calculating machine" (1997, 130). His data and conclusions complement other scientific work that establishes a biological basis for the human propensity toward property rights (Pipes 1999, chap. 2). The totality of this evidence furnishes a compelling case for the existence of a biologically evolved "natural law" governing economic and political relationships. This point is especially relevant to the social sciences, where many contemporary thinkers adhere reflexively to the political economist Jeremy Bentham's nonsense-on-stilts characterization of natural-law theory. Biology diminishes the force of Bentham's argument. Conversely, it validates Aquinas's earlier

attempt to equate spontaneous human impulses toward "the good" and "the morally right" with innately rational thinking: "There is in people an appetite for the good of their nature as rational, and this is proper to them, that they should know truths about God and about living in society. Correspondingly whatever this involves is a matter of natural law, for instance that people should shun ignorance, not offend others with whom they ought to live in civility, and other such related requirements" (qtd. in Freeman 2003, 331). The biology underlying our social-exchange instinct provides an objective basis for interpreting Aquinas's God as an instrumental concept. It supports the argument advanced by Nietzsche (and others) that a "transcendent God had never existed except as merely an idea (epistemology) in the human mind. And this idea of a personal God is no longer meaningful to human beings because they now are becoming aware of the fact that this belief is only the product of their own needs and desires grounded in a wishful imagination" (exegetical introduction, [1883] 1993, 17). Interpreting God instrumentally in this fashion nevertheless falls short of imagining that "He" might also find expression as a phalanx of tangible and truly all-too-human political gods, each having the power and transitory incentives to make wishful imagination come true. It does not recognize, in other words, that religious fundamentalism and political fundamentalism are intrinsically of a piece.

The apotheosis of democracy is moving American society toward a social equilibrium in which one's loyalties to the state once again are indistinguishable from religious devotion. This shift calls to mind a Spenglerian "second religiousness"—a final stage in the evolutionary cycle of culture and civilization during which "Late-Classical man [re]turns to the practice of the cults . . . dispense[s] with proof, [and] desire[s] only to believe and not to dissect" (Spengler 1926, 1:108, 1:424). This description of "Late-Classical man" captures the essence of both religious and political fundamentalism. Oswald Spengler was a philosopher of history who stressed *destiny* over causality (1926, 1:26). His view of social evolution contrasts with that of later scholars, such as the economist Mancur Olson (1982), who offered causal rent-seeking theories to explain the rise and decline of nations. Both approaches, however, predict that the descending portion of social cycles will be marked by increasingly coercive politics and a coarsened national culture, which give rise in turn to dysfunctional societies characterized by bread and circuses, welfare and warfare, and cultish political theology—social artifacts that arguably are evident today. (The political theorist Francis Fukuyama [1992] notably argues, in contrast, that history is directional rather than cyclical and that it terminates in classical-liberal democracy.) The argument of this essay, in contrast to those of Spengler, Olsen, and others, is that human biology explains—in a way not previously understood by philosophers, historians, and economists—the biological process underlying the rise and decline of cultures, nations, and civilizations.

The apotheosis of American democracy trails a historical pattern that the mythologist Joseph Campbell characterizes as an "unprecedented shift of ground" in Western culture (1972, 24). This shift entailed "the rise [in philosophy and politics] of the individual, his selfhood, his rights, and his freedom" (61). Campbell

imagines that "people have begun to take the existence of their supporting social orders for granted, and instead of aiming to defend and maintain the integrity of the community have begun to place at the center of concern the development and protection of the individual—the individual, moreover, not as an organ of the state but as an end and entity in himself" (24). Campbell evidently does not recognize that this "shift of ground" has also expanded the scope of beneficial opportunities for social cooperation and that it probably occurred for precisely this reason. Instead, he treats the shift derisively, as if it represented a rebellion against nature rather than being a faithful expression of it. This stylized view of man as social animal is fundamentally at odds with the underlying biology of human behavior. Where Campbell argues that the individual's place in nature and society is spiritually and altruistically based, sociobiology proves instead that the individual's place is defined by innate maximizing strategies and behaviors that tend toward a Panglossian social equilibrium. Edward Wilson notes that "[a] rational ant . . . would find [as Campbell does that] the very concept of individual freedom [is] intrinsically unsound" (1978, 199). Rational human behavior, however, differs fundamentally from the rational ant behavior, as Wilson explains, despite both behaviors' being inspired by biologically coded drives toward survival and reproduction. Biologists now recognize that "very few animals ever put the interest of the group or species before the individual. Without exception, all those that do are actually putting *family* first, not group" (Ridley 1997, 176, italics added). This strong conclusion adds weight to the suspicion, voiced earlier, that the taste for redistributive democracy flows from a flawed evolutionary predisposition. The idea that human individuals "should" act strictly for the good of society, à la Campbell, is itself a popular myth that springs from the irrepressible human desire to discover cooperative social exchange where none actually exists. Campbell's argument unfortunately is representative of a thick, widely accepted, and utterly mistaken social-science literature.

Another aspect of Campbell's work is more useful for exploring the political apotheosis phenomenon. Accompanying the "unprecedented shift" in Western social structure, he observes,

> has come the notion of a "personal god" [who] sits now behind the laws of the universe, not in front of them. Whereas in the older [ancient Greek] view . . . the god is simply a sort of cosmic bureaucrat, and the great natural laws of the universe govern all that he is and does and must do, we have now a [biblical] god who himself determines what laws are to operate; who says, "Let such-and-such come to pass!" and it comes to pass. There is, accordingly, a stress here rather on personality and on whim than on irrefragable law. The god can change his mind, as he frequently does. (1972, 76–77)

Campbell illustrates this dichotomy by contrasting the biblical figure Job with Aeschylus's fictional character Prometheus. Job reverently addresses his god-behind-the-law (who will be what he will be) by saying, "I know that thou canst do all things."

Aeschylus, in contrast, disrespects his bureaucratic god, calling him "a monster. . . . I care less than nothing for Zeus. Let him do as he likes" (qtd. in Campbell 1972, 81). The personal God who sits behind the law commands respect and devotion; bureaucratic gods who sit in front of it attract derision.

The personal gods of American democratic fundamentalism appear to sit behind the laws of society, and yet they are also the objects of Promethean abuse. The apotheosis of democracy stands classical social tradition on its head in this regard, and the reason why is readily apparent. The gods of mythology and religion were instrumental products of the human mind—selective deductions and imputations for explaining everyday phenomena in the absence of scientific understanding. Democratic fundamentalism, by contrast, comprises elected and appointed gods of decidedly all-too-human form that are neither omnipotent nor divinely anointed. The structural separation of political powers in democratic republics casts politicians both as potentates and as bureaucrats. The gods of democratic fundamentalism sit *both* behind the law and in front of it, depending on the circumstances, and so are regarded with a fitting blend of reverence and contempt.

Common-law judges in America were quintessential bureaucrats. They sat, like Greek gods, in front of the law rather than behind it, *discovering* the law rather than fashioning it (Hogue [1966] 1986). The common law, according to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. ([1880] 1991), represented the triumph of human experience over abstract logic. By "experience," Holmes alluded to the totality of human history, which now can be understood as having unfolded pursuant to biologically programmed processes. Today's system of statutory law, in contrast to the now discarded common law, reflects (except by coincidence) the triumph of arbitrary and even whimsical interests over both experience and logic. Contrary to the cultures studied by Campbell, the bureaucratic common law inspired a spiritual awe that the omnipotent statutory law does not. Hence, the exaggerated need for force and coercion in societies that are governed by statutory regimes.

The discoveries of sociobiology require that some additional tenets of economics and philosophy be reassessed. Two cases illustrate this need. First, the economist F.A. Hayek famously condemned the reflexive belief that any process "not consciously directed as a whole is . . . itself a blemish, a proof of its irrationality and of the need completely to replace it by a deliberately designed mechanism" ([1952] 1979, 9). The push to dilute the science of evolutionary biology with notions of "intelligent design" is a vivid example of this tendency. Hayek labeled such behavior the "abuse of reason," but it now is recognized as flowing naturally from the instinctive biological tendency to anthropomorphize.

Second, in a similar vein, philosophy requires that acts be committed for the right reasons to be regarded as "moral." Instinctive and spontaneous acts are denied moral standing even when their consequences are beneficial. However, moral reasoning itself is rooted not only in the biological instinct for cooperation and reciprocity, but also in the flawed tendency to project these predispositions onto inapposite

situations. Using moral precepts to critique instinctive social processes is an inescapably circular exercise.

Apotheosis and Democratic Constraint

American society began only recently to constrain in a serious way the interplay between soulcraft and statecraft. The chosen constraints presume that the forces of religion and politics are inherently separable phenomena, one being rooted in trust and faith and the other in reason. Overlooked so far is the ease with which statecraft has apotheosized by filling the role now partially vacated by soulcraft's personal God. The challenge for statecraft at this juncture is to constrain itself to the same extent that it has constrained soulcraft.

Constitutional barriers between soulcraft and statecraft were a rational consequence of abuses flowing from the medieval church's monopoly to interpret God's will and to broker God's good grace (Ekelund et al. 1996). This monopoly eventually was constrained, first by bloody competition from Protestantism and later by secular competition from rationalism. The relatively peaceful mechanism of constitutional constraint appeared somewhat later.

America's First Amendment proscriptions dictate that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion [the 'establishment' clause], or prohibiting the free exercise thereof [the 'exercise' clause]." These rules reflect, in part, the framers' concern for the church's historical status as a political faction whose secular power and authority often exceeded the state's own. They also evince a concern about the power of religion to impose self-interested answers to the most fundamental question of political theory: "Why should any one individual obey [rather than merely cooperate with] either other individuals or groups or bodies of individuals?" (Berlin 2002, 1). The Constitution's framers sought to establish a government that, despite God's presumed blessing, would succeed (or not) by the strength of its cooperative, secular merits. The framers may have prayed for success in this endeavor, but they could not have imagined their creation's becoming either an object of worship in its own right or an instrument for coercing answers to the "why" question of political theory.

The Supreme Court, which awkwardly ascribes contemporary meaning to the Constitution's religious proscriptions, recently winked offhand approval for the "under God" clause that was added fifty years ago to the nation's "Pledge of Allegiance" (*Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdon,* 542 U.S. 1 [2004]). The Court's opinion recalled that a civic "pledge of allegiance" to the American flag initially was proposed by a youth-oriented magazine in 1892. That text remained a private enterprise until 1942, when Congress nationalized it within a codified set of "rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the flag of the United States of America" (Chapter 435, 56 Stat. 377). The "under God" clause was inserted twelve years later (Chapter 297, 68 Stat. 249) to differentiate American democratic fundamentalism from godless

Marxism. The clause's symbolic meaning now exceeds the boundaries of secular "ceremonial deism." Religious and democratic fundamentalists alike employ these words today as the thin edge of a broad policy wedge wielded in a thinly veiled attempt to re-fuse God with an apotheosized state.

The conversation surrounding the pledge's "under God" clause consistently misses the episode's most salient point. The pledge itself is a prayer—a Nicene-like apostles' creed that is recited compulsorily, hand over heart, in government-operated primary and secondary schools and at miscellaneous public functions. It addresses not God in heaven, but "our father, who art in Washington," where God's all-too-human incarnation resides amid a large and growing collection of temples, monuments, shrines, iconography, ceremony, sacred relics, and secular holidays (literally, "holy days") that rivals the religious artifacts of ancient Rome and Thebes. The God of old-time religion is an instrumental afterthought in this pledge-as-prayer, invoked merely to circumscribe "one nation" ("us") against a godless enemy ("them").

The most remarkable aspect of the pledge controversy is that all of the forces at play—the gods of religious and democratic fundamentalism, the raw passions that these gods inspire, and the dichotomization of groups into "us" and "them"—are natural products of the human brain's social-exchange organ.

Conclusion

Many of the concerns that underlie America's constitutional separation of soulcraft and statecraft receded along with the public significance of the West's covenant with a personal god. The greater concern today for republican government, American culture, and Western civilization lies not with potential abuses of traditional religious ideologies, but with the apotheosis of Western political systems. This problem arises because religious fundamentalism and democratic fundamentalism flow from the same, imperfect biological process that projects social exchange onto inapposite situations.

The philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris (2004) argues that societies can and must protect themselves against a litany of present evils by strengthening their embrace of reason and renouncing religion. Sociobiology and the argument of this essay encourage a more specific conclusion: the overarching concern at this juncture is the apotheosis of secular government. Rather than simply renouncing religion, we must heed the biologist Richard Dawkins's warning to "rebel against the tyranny of our selfish [biological] replicators" wherever their effects produce adverse social consequences (qtd. in Ridley 1997, 145). The state's assumption of duties once relegated to religion's personal God crosses this threshold. Rebellion profitably entails teaching that the cardinal human virtues are rooted in human biology and that good and comprehensive scientific understanding, not the Ten Commandments, is essential to understanding and strengthening those virtues that appear to be in decline. Ridley explains why this course of rebellion is appropriate:

> For St. Augustine the source of social order lay in the teachings of Christ. For Hobbes it lay in the sovereign. For Rousseau it lay in the solitude. For Lenin it lay in the Party. They were all wrong. The roots of social order are in our heads, where we possess the instinctive capacities for creating not a perfectly harmonious and virtuous society, but a better one than we have at present. We must build our institutions in such a way that they draw out those instincts. . . . [T]he human mind contains numerous instincts for building social cooperation and seeking a reputation for niceness. We are not so nasty that we need to be tamed by intrusive government, nor so nice that too much government does not bring out the worst in us, both as its employees and as its clients. (1997, 262, 264)

Biological evolution has produced not only advantageous instincts for reciprocity, trust, and cooperation, but also the deeply adverse consequences of wishful imagination made real by apotheosized government. Understanding and accepting the underlying science are essential to maximizing the value that is inherent in our human nature.

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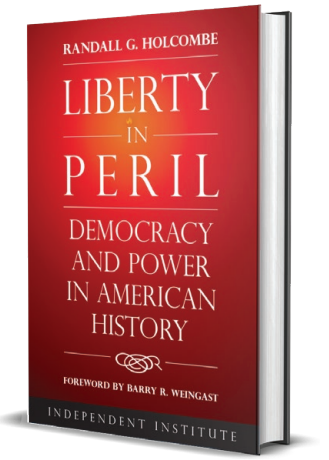
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